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THE LIFE

OF

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

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A. C. Swinburne and his sisters
from the painting by George Richmond R.A.
in the National Portrait Gallery

Gracey Walker ph.sc.

THE LIFE

OF

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

BY

EDMUND GOSSE, C.B.

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON
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PREFACE

THE only memoir of the life of Algernon Charles Swinburne which has hitherto been published is the sketch which I contributed to the *Dictionary of National Biography* in 1912. This was the result of some years of investigation, and it is the skeleton on which the present biography is built up. But since that article was issued, a great deal of new material has passed through my hands, and I have had the advantage of consulting many fresh sources of information. Important correspondence has been entrusted to me, and early friends have kindly consented to revise my pages. My narrative is therefore not merely much fuller than it would have been in 1912, but in various respects more accurate.

Only those who have never adventured on the biography of an elder contemporary, and especially of one who lived in great retirement, will under-estimate the difficulty of obtaining exact particulars. Events which occurred seventy, or even sixty, years ago are remembered by few, and the recollections of these few are seldom consistent.

The unaided memory of old companions is apt to play strange vagaries, and in matters which are comparatively unimportant may differ in a degree distracting to the biographer. An additional difficulty is added in the present case, for Swinburne himself was an autobiographical Will o' the Wisp. He was not disinclined to give information about his life, but his recollections need the closest inspection. In the midst of a statement of considerable importance and value, he is apt to introduce, by a slip of memory, some remark which makes the whole narrative seem apocryphal; and the biographer must always be prosaically guarding the poet against his own romance. After the checking and rechecking of eight years, however, I believe that I have surmounted the main difficulties of the task.

In attempting to do so, I have met with extraordinary and almost universal kindness from Swinburne's representatives and friends. Before all other helpers I must mention my dear and valued friend, the late Lord Redesdale, who never ceased to press me forward on my course with his unfailing interest and sympathy. There was no limit to his friendly solicitude, and he insisted on seeing the book through all its stages. He finished reading the last revise after he was confined to his bed by his fatal illness. Although in the body of the narrative I have made use

of the recollections which he collected at my request, I have printed, in an appendix, the letter itself in which Lord Redesdale embodied most of those memories, for it is an excellent and characteristic specimen of his own manner of writing. It is a sorrow to me that this volume, to the publication of which he so indulgently looked forward, can never reach his hands.

The early friends of Swinburne who have helped me are too numerous to be mentioned here, and their aid is acknowledged in the text. I must, however, express my particular thanks to Lord Bryce, who has been good enough to read the Oxford chapter, to which, moreover, he has substantially contributed. Those helpers who died while my book was being slowly prepared must be named here with regret as well as gratitude—Ingram Bywater, R. W. Raper, Edith Sichel, Francis Warre-Cornish, J. L. Strachan-Davidson.

The Marquess of Crewe has generously placed at my disposal the correspondence of Swinburne with his father, Lord Houghton, together with important illustrative matter. Viscount Morley has entrusted to me his file of the poet's letters, and has been so kind as to read Chapters VI. and VII. in proof. Professor James Fitzmaurice-Kelly has read my proofs and given me many valuable suggestions. But most of all I have to thank Mr. Thomas J. Wise for loyal and active help

throughout, for endless loans of MSS. and correspondence, and for free access to his unrivalled collection of Swinburniana. In my fourth Appendix I give fuller testimony to his part in my labours.

So large is the amount of new biographical detail which I found in my possession and was unwilling to ignore, that I was obliged to abandon the idea of adding, in a final chapter, an estimate of Swinburne's comparative place in literature, and particularly in the history of poetry. Various books with this purpose have been published, among them those of Wratislaw (1900), Woodberry (1906), Mackail (1909), Thomas (1913), Drinkwater (1913), and Welby (1914). More will doubtless be attempted, since the genius of Swinburne will never cease to interest critics, and successive generations of students will be drawn to examine his writings with more and more intelligence and sympathy.

EDMUND GOSSE.

January 1917.

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CHAPTER I

CHILDHOOD—ETON

(1837–1853)

It would be interesting to see what light a man of penetration, who, like the late Sir Francis Galton, had made a scientific study of the principles of heredity, could throw upon the somewhat extraordinary lineage of Algernon Swinburne. The poet himself was inclined to dwell on the notable character of his parentage on both sides, and to claim to be the efflorescence of two tough and redoubtable races. It is, however, clear that whatever their adventures had been neither the Swinburnes nor the Ashburnhams had produced a poet or a scholar before. They were pure types of the aristocratic class in its moods for producing sportsmen, soldiers, and county magnates. The traveller Henry Swinburne (1743–1803) was the sole member of either family who had sought distinction with his pen. This detachment from letters must be dwelt upon, because it was an object of constant interest to the poet himself, who took a considerable pride in the supposed chivalry and violence of his forbears. In a letter to Stedman, in 1875, after expatiating on the deeds of his ancestors, he wrote

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with a certain complacency, "I think you will allow that when this race chose at last to produce a poet, it would have been at least remarkable if he had been content to write nothing but hymns and idylls for clergymen and young ladies to read out in chapels and drawing-rooms."[1]

There had been, indeed, nothing idyllic in the history of the Swinburnes, an ancient Border clan of the county of Northumberland. According to family tradition, which the poet accepted, "there was a Swinburne peerage, but it has been dormant or forfeit since the thirteenth or fourteenth century." Less shadowy is a Sir Adam de Swinburne of the reign of Edward II., a man-at-arms whose grandson, or other descendant, lost Swinburne Castle, but became lord of Chollerton and Capheaton. While the Percys lived in semi-royal state at Wrassil, in Yorkshire, the Swinburnes had charge of their vast Northumbrian possessions; from a MS. document of 22 Henry VII., I learn that in that year George Swinburne was master-forester to Henry, fifth Earl of Northumberland (1477–1527). After romantic adventures which the poet loved to recite, the family settled at Capheaton in the beginning of the reign of Elizabeth, and has resided there ever since. In 1660 a baronetcy was conferred on John Swinburne "virum, patrimonii censu et morum probitate spectabilem," and has survived to our day. Three successive baronets married wives of royal descent. During Algernon's childhood and early manhood, his grandfather, Sir John

[1] Mrs. Disney Leith supplies, however, a warning word—"Algernon had a very bad head for genealogies."

Swinburne, was head of the house, and this very remarkable man did more than any other person to awaken the proclivities and moral temperament of the poet. From his turbulent grandfather he inherited his republicanism, his impatience of restraint, his love of violent exercise, and from both families his elaborate and ceremonious courtesy. Sir John Swinburne, who had been born in 1762, was a link with the eighteenth century more than half-way down the nineteenth, for he lived to enter his ninety-ninth year, and to die in 1860. From his grandson's recollections of him a quotation may be pertinent:

Born and brought up in France, his father (I believe) a naturalized Frenchman (we were all Catholic and Jacobite rebels and exiles) and his mother a lady of the house of Polignac[1] . . . my grandfather never left France till called away at twenty-five on the falling in of such English estates (about half the original quantity) as confiscation had left to a family which in every Catholic rebellion from the days of my own Queen Mary to those of Charles Edward had given their blood like water and their lands like dust for the Stuarts. I assume that his Catholicism sat lightly upon a young man who in the age of Voltaire had enjoyed the personal friendship of Mirabeau. . . . He was (of course on the ultra-Liberal side) one of the most extreme politicians as well as one of the hardest riders and the best art-patrons of his time. . . . It was said that the two maddest things in the north country were his horse and himself. . . . He was the friend of the great Turner, of Mulready, and of many lesser artists: I wish to God he

[1] Mrs. Disney Leith considers that in claiming this descent the poet made a mistake. Miss Isabel Swinburne (who died, the last survivor of the Admiral's children, on the 5th of November 1915) thought that her brother may have heard his grandfather talk vaguely of French connections, and misunderstood the nature of them.

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had discovered Blake. . . . He was most kind and affectionate to me always as child, boy, and youth. To the last he was far liker in appearance and manners to an old French nobleman than to any type of the average English gentleman.

On the other side, influences came from the Ashburnhams, whom Fuller described two centuries and a half ago as " a family of stupendous antiquity " ; settled in Sussex before the Norman Conquest. The poet took pleasure in the fidelity of John Ashburnham who " was the closest follower of Charles I. to his death," and who cleverly arranged the King's safe-conduct from Oxford. A barony rewarded the son of this cavalier, and an earldom followed in 1730. In the course of the eighteenth century both the Ashburnhams and the Swinburnes married into the family of the Dukes of Northumberland. All this genealogy is to be lightly passed over, but not ignored. The poet, although so ardent a republican, was no democrat, and he did not affect, like " the gardener Adam and his wife," to " smile at the claims of long descent."

1837 ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE was born in Chester Street, Grosvenor Place, London, on the 5th of April 1837. He was the eldest of the six children of Admiral Charles Henry Swinburne (1797–1877), by his wife Lady Jane Henrietta (1809–1896), daughter of George, third Earl of Ashburnham. The admiral was the second son of the sixth baronet, the friend of Mirabeau ; he is described to me by a survivor as devoted to mechanics, with some interest in music but none in literature. Towards the close of his life the

poet wrote to Mr. Thomas Hardy that his "father served as a midshipman under Collingwood,[1] and knew Lady Hester Stanhope in her later days when an Eastern princess and prophetess. She was very civil and pleasant to him, and I always as a boy thought what fun it must have been as an experience." From his father the poet inherited, however, little except a certain identity of colour and expression; Algernon's features and something of his mental character being his mother's. From her father, the third Earl, she had received a careful education, and she possessed considerable literary taste. In particular, she cultivated with ardour the French and Italian languages. Much of her youth had been spent in Florence, at a time when the elegant accomplishment for Englishwomen was, *par excellence*, Italian, and Lady Jane taught the elements of that tongue to her eldest son at an extremely early age. Swinburne told me that he had read the *Orlando Furioso* long before he *heard* of *The Faerie Queen*.

His father's family also had a curious connection with Italy. Algernon's grand-uncle, Robert Swinburne, became an Austrian subject, and rose to be a general and a baron of the Holy Roman Empire. He was at the time of his death Austrian Governor of Milan. His son, Baron E. R. F. F. Swinburne, who died as lately as 1907, was Chamberlain to the Emperor Franz Josef. These were strange kinsmen for the poet

[1] This must have been a slip of memory, for Collingwood died six months before the future admiral started his career at the Royal Naval College in September 1810. He served at sea in various capacities, and several times on the Mediterranean station, from 1812 to 1833, but saw no fighting.

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who was never tired of denouncing "the plume-plucked Austrian vulture-head, twin-crested."

Though born, almost by accident, in London, the whole of Swinburne's childhood was spent in the country, with his parents in the southern part of the Isle of Wight, and with his grandfather in Northumberland. Swinburne stated in a letter to Stedman that he was born "all but dead, and certainly was not expected to live an hour."[1] But he grew up a healthy boy, and passed through his childhood without anything more serious than mild attacks of the usual infantile disorders. He was, from the first, nervous and fragile in appearance, but underneath his sprite-like slenderness there lurked a wiry persistency of constitution. Admiral Swinburne rented East Dene, a large house in Bonchurch, at the eastern extremity of the village, and immediately under the high cornice of St. Boniface Down. The rambling gardens and lawns of East Dene descend southward to the sea-shore, divided from it only by the masked path that leads to Luccombe, and so they practically shelve from the great trees in the shadow of the Undercliff down to the shingle and the seaweed. The view from the house south-east is over limitless ocean. Close by, to the east, is the wonderful chaos of the Landslip with its tangled lianas and romantic chasms, and to the west, the shores of Monk's Bay and Horse Shoe Bay with their groynes and their fishermen's boats, so that on each side there lay an enchanted Tom Tiddler's

[1] Mrs. Disney Leith, however, regards this statement of her cousin's as apocryphal.

Ground for emancipated children through the blissful and interminable seasons of seventy years ago.

But although East Dene was such a paradise for an active and healthy child, it did not stand alone in Algernon's fortunate experience. Five miles east of Bonchurch, on the romantic high-road between the Undercliff and the sea, stood the Orchard, the home of Sir Willoughby Gordon. Algernon's uncle and aunt, Sir Henry and Lady Mary Gordon, lived at Northcourt, at Shorwell, which was about an equal distance from Bonchurch. They with their children, of whom Mrs. Disney Leith was one, made frequent visits to the grandparents' seaside home, The Orchard, where might be constantly seen "Algernon, riding on a very small pony, led by a servant," come to spend an enchanting day with his cousins by the sea at St. Catherine's Point or in Puckaster Cove, or, straying farther afield, in the sinuous and leafy lanes of Niton or over the hills to Chale.

From some stanzas addressed to his aunt, Lady Mary Gordon, in which Swinburne attempted late in life to sum up his memories of the garden at The Orchard, one may here be quoted, in which, looking far backward, he declares that—

> The sun to sport in and the cliffs to scale,
> The sea to clasp and wrestle with, till breath
> For rapture more than weariness would fail,
> All-golden gifts of dawn, whose record saith
> That time nor change may turn their life to death,
> Live not in loving thought alone, though there
> The life they live be lovelier than they were
> When clothed in present light and actual air.

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A year or two later, Algernon and his eldest sister Alice would be seen "walking on ahead of the rest over the rough grass of the Bonchurch down—he with that springy dancing step which he never entirely lost." The surviving cousin, now Mrs. Disney Leith, has preserved a charming picture of the walks and games "up the hill," in which the future poet took the lead of a happy band of playmates. In all his pleasures, however, although they included riding, roaming, and climbing, the sea took the foremost place. His own words are significant:

> As for the sea (he wrote to Stedman), its salt *must* have been in my blood before I was born. I can remember no earlier enjoyment than being held up naked in my father's arms and brandished between his hands, then shot like a stone from a sling through the air, shouting and laughing with delight, head foremost into the coming wave. . . . I remember being afraid of other things, but never of the sea.

For his aunt, Lady Mary Gordon, who died in 1899 in her eighty-fourth year, the poet retained through life an almost passionate devotion. In some hitherto unpublished lines, written shortly before her death, he tells her that—

> Child and boy and man, one equal light
> Of loving kindness made me in your sight
> Glad always as the sea makes all shores bright.

In the happy household at The Orchard he was always known by the romantic name of Cousin Hadji.

The Swinburnes were a devout Anglican family, looked upon as rather "high" in those early days of ecclesiastical revival. In the midst

of the poet's early childhood, the household was thrilled by the Oxford Movement and by the formidable, yet exhilarating, charges of heresy brought against its leaders. Without going very deeply into theology, they threw in their lot with Newman and Keble, and their Anglicanism took a warmer and vivider colouring. In this the household at East Dene was fully supported by the families at Niton and at Northcourt, and Algernon Swinburne was trained in a strictly High Church atmosphere. As child and boy he was, as he afterwards put it, "brought up quasi-Catholic." Into the religious exercises of Sunday he entered even "passionately," and when it was his turn to read the Bible aloud or make a reply from the Catechism, those who listened early remarked how beautifully he did it. In particular, his mother insisted, and there was no need for her to urge on so ardent a pupil, that her eldest son should acquire an extended knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. This acquaintance with the text of the Bible he retained to the end of his life, and he was accustomed to be emphatic about the advantage he had received from the beauty of its language. At a very early age he was perceived to have a marked fondness for reading, and Mrs. Disney Leith retains her recollection that "Algernon was always privileged to have a book at meals."

Less has been recorded about his childish visits to Capheaton, but his own poems contain innumerable references to the effect of the bracing Northumberland landscape upon his nerves. It was the habit of the Swinburnes to spend the

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late summer and early autumn in the north, so as to escape the sultry heats of Bonchurch and Niton, exposed in August to the full glare of the sea. A large cousinhood gathered at Capheaton "in those bright autumn days, where everything seemed to combine for the delight of youth—a lake to row and sail on, lovely gardens and woods to roam or play in, and, above all, abundance of ponies to ride." The rough and manly aspect of Northumberland, where—

> Through fell and moorland,
> And salt-sea foreland,
> Our noisy norland
> Resounds and rings,

gave an element of strength to Swinburne's genius, just as the rich southward boskage of the Isle of Wight gave it sweetness and melody. All through his life, his idea of a southern scene was of looking from the ferny dells of Bonchurch out over gardens to the Channel; a northern one, of looking eastward over the great lion-coloured sands of Bamborough towards a grey and storm-shaken Northumbrian ocean.

This rapidly-developing intelligence taxed and yet stimulated the powers of his mother, who instructed a "soul-hydroptic" pupil in the elements of history, of religion, and of the languages of Italy and France. His amiable docility was extreme; he responded with astonishing eagerness to all the advances of knowledge, and his demands soon became greater than Lady Jane could afford to respond to. It was determined, as he was destined for Eton, to entrust him to the care of Collingwood Foster Fenwick,

the rector of Brook, a parish at the other end of the island. Northcourt, the home of Algernon's uncle and aunt Gordon, was about half-way between Bonchurch and Brook, and an easy pony-ride from the latter. The link between the families, therefore, was not broken. Mr. Fenwick expressed himself astonished at finding the child already so deeply taught in certain directions. He was not, however, either at home or at Brook, allowed to read any fiction, Lady Jane Swinburne having firm views on this subject. There seems to be some little doubt as to the date when this embargo was raised. Lord Redesdale thinks it coincided with Algernon's arrival at Eton. The poet himself told me that the earliest novel he was ever allowed to see was *Dombey and Son*, and that he read it in the serial numbers; these were brought to a conclusion in 1848, but we are not obliged to believe that they circulated immediately in the Swinburne households.

Swinburne entered Eton at the beginning of the summer half of 1849, being then twelve years of age. His father and mother brought him to school and at once sent for his first cousin, Algernon Bertram Mitford, that they might put him under the care of a kinsman five weeks his senior. I had the singular good fortune to be able to obtain from this cousin, afterwards the first Lord Redesdale (1837–1916), a very full and picturesque account of the poet's arrival and behaviour at school.[1] He was to "look after him," and although there was little differ-

[1] For the complete text of these reminiscences see Appendix I. of this volume.

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ence in the boys' ages, the elder had been sent to school when he was nine years old and was well versed in all the ways of Eton, "mysteries bewildering to the uninitiated." Lord Redesdale writes:

> What a fragile little creature he seemed as he stood there between his father and mother, with his wondering eyes fixed upon me! Under his arm he hugged his Bowdler's Shakespeare, a very precious treasure bound in brown leather with, for a marker, a narrow slip of ribbon, blue I think, with a button of that most heathenish marqueterie called Tunbridge ware dangling from the end of it. He was strangely tiny. His limbs were small and delicate, and his sloping shoulders looked far too weak to carry his great head, the size of which was exaggerated by the tousled mass of red hair standing almost at right angles to it. Hero-worshippers talk of his hair as having been a "golden aureole." At that time there was nothing golden about it. Red, violent, aggressive red it was, unmistakable red, like burnished copper. His features were small and beautiful, chiselled as daintily as those of some Greek sculptor's masterpiece. His skin was very white—not unhealthy, but a transparent tinted white, such as one sees in the petals of some roses. His face was the very replica of that of his dear mother, and she was one of the most refined and lovely of women. His red hair must have come from the Admiral's side, for I never heard of a red-haired Ashburnham.

Sir George Young, who was six months Swinburne's junior, was introduced to him by Joynes in September 1849, and saw a good deal of him that half and the next; and then again a year later. He gives a slightly more elaborate account of Swinburne's appearance. "His hair was of three different colours and textures, red,

dark red, and bright, pure gold." Both combine to describe him as at that time "a fascinating, most lovable little child," and both speak of a certain isolation which marked him off from others; "he was not at home among Eton boys," says Sir George Young; his cousin tells us he was "shy and reserved." But let Lord Redesdale continue his clear and invaluable recollections:

> We rapidly became friends. Of course, being in separate houses, we could not be so constantly together as if we had both been in the same house. I was at Evans's and Durnford was my tutor. Swinburne was at Joynes's and of course Joynes was his tutor. Still we often met, and pretty frequently breakfasted together, he with me, or I with him. Chocolate in his room, tea in mine. The guest brought his own "order" of rolls and butter, and the feast was made rich by the addition of sixpennyworth of scraped beef or ham from Joe Groves's, a small sock-shop which was almost immediately under Joynes's house. Little gifts such as our humble purses could afford cemented our friendship: I still possess and treasure an abbreviated edition of Froissart's *Chronicles* which Algernon gave me (in 1850) now, alas! sixty-five years ago.

He boarded at the house in Keate's Lane now known as Keate House. It was "Joynes'" then. Mrs. Warre-Cornish, who has collected some of the legends of the houses in those days, tells the following story of a visit paid by Lady Jane Swinburne to her son when he had the measles—she read Shakespeare to him through the day:

> . . . and when she left him at tea-time to take tea with Mrs. Joynes, the maid brought from home was requested by the boy to continue reading whilst he took his. A pot of jam suddenly emptied on the reader's head was a

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sign that this interpretation of Shakespeare did *not* soothe the patient. The other story is connected with the night-dose for wintry colds. This one was brought in to a boy, who stood up on his bed instead of lying on it, and whose wild, rolling eye accompanied a passionate outpouring of verse. The ministering incomer feared delirium, but was told that it was " only little Swinburne reciting as usual."

He was, like everybody else, now and then indisposed, and Sir George Young remembers, on another occasion, seeing him in bed when " his little white face, great aureole of hair, and green eyes, looked at me from the pillow." Swinburne's physical strangeness was the object of wonder at Eton, but he was preserved from bullying by a certain dignity and by his unquestionable courage. He was not interfered with since he interfered with no one else, and Sir George Young admits that, even as quite a small boy, there was " something a little formidable about him."

There would naturally be a section of his schoolfellows to whom there was nothing attractive in his temperament, and when I applied to the late Lord St. Aldwyn, who was his contemporary at Eton, he could recall nothing except that Swinburne was " a horrid little boy, with a big red head and a pasty complexion, who looked as though a course of physical exercise would have done him good." The disproportionate size of his head—which was noticeable all through his life, although ridiculously denied after his death—was an object of amazement at Eton. His hat was the largest in the school, when he was only twelve years of age. The present Provost recounts how one

day, in a schoolroom only approached by a sort of ladder, Swinburne's wild and glowing head appeared one dark morning very late for school as if out of the floor, and how the Master in charge, who was W. G. Cookesley (1802–1880), paused to exclaim, "Ha! here's the rising sun at last!" Cookesley, who was a scholar and an intelligent man, ought to have made out that Swinburne was something extraordinary.

During the holidays of that year, 1849, Swinburne's parents travelled in the Lakes, and took Algernon with them. In September they all visited Rydal Mount, where the aged Wordsworth received them with great civility. Miss Elizabeth Sewell (1815–1906) was present on this very interesting occasion, and made the following entry in her journal:

> He [Mr. Wordsworth] was so very nice to Algernon, especially at last, that I could have cried, as Algernon did when we went away. . . . Lady Jane said what a pleasure it had been to bring Algernon, and how he had looked forward to it, as he was already acquainted with his writings. Wordsworth's answer was, "Yes, he supposed Algernon might have read 'We are Seven' and some other little things. There was nothing in his writings that would do the boy harm, and there were some things that might do him good." Some observation was made about Algernon's not forgetting his visit, and Wordsworth's words were, "He did not think Algernon would forget him."

Wordsworth died six months later, and Swinburne told me that when the news reached Eton it "darkened the April sunshine" for him.

There is a general agreement that an almost

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immediate development of Swinburne's intellect followed his arrival at Eton. His bringing up at home had been scrupulously strict, but his mother demanded from him no further protestations or promises, except that he would not look at Byron's poems; she felt that a brain so precocious could be fed no longer upon food for babes. Lord Redesdale becomes again our guide:

> His school work was prepared, as in the case of other boys, in his room; his reading for pleasure was done in the boys' library in Weston's yard. I can see him now sitting perched up Turk-or-tailor-wise in one of the windows looking out on the yard, with some huge old-world tome, almost as big as himself, upon his lap, the afternoon sun setting on fire the great mop of red hair.

This is confirmed by Mr. Luxmoore, who remembers seeing him at the top of a ladder in the College Library, with his bright head against the dark book-shelves. "Few boys had access to the College Library then, but Swinburne found out the way, and was constantly seen there."

Another contemporary describes him pointed out to visitors by "Grub" Brown, the librarian, as one of the sights of Eton, where he sat, day after day, in a gallery-window of the library with a folio across his knees. He read the English poets with such assiduity, and over so wide a range, that it could seem to Sir George Young difficult to say what, as a little schoolboy, Swinburne "did not know and did not appreciate of English literature." His copy of Dr. Johnson's *Lives of the English Poets* bears on it, in his handwriting, the date April 18, 1850.

Earlier than this his mother had given him a copy of Beattie's *Minstrel*, a poem then still much admired by readers of mature years. His extraordinary and lifelong devotion to the minor dramatists of the Elizabethan and Jacobean ages dates from his early Eton days.

Thirty years later, when Swinburne was looking over my book-shelves, he took down a copy of Lamb's *Specimens of the English Dramatic Poets*, and, turning to me, said, "That book taught me more than any other in the world,—that and the Bible." He wrote (in 1885) that the plays of Marston had dwelt in his memory since "I first read them at the advanced age of twelve," and (in 1887) that those of so obscure a writer as Nabbes had been familiar to him "ever since my thirteenth year." He induced his mother to buy for him Dyce's edition of the *Works* of Marlowe when it was quite a new book, and this was issued in 1850. In the same year he was in possession of Massinger and Ford. Swinburne constantly attributed to himself a love and some budding knowledge of most of the rarer Elizabethans at the extremely precocious age of thirteen. Again we must lay Lord Redesdale under contribution; the description refers to a slightly later date, perhaps to 1851 or 1852.

Algernon was now devouring the great classics of France and Italy. His memory was wonderful, his power of quotation almost unlimited. We used to take long walks together in Windsor Forest and in the Home Park, where the famous oak of Herne the Hunter was still standing, a white, lightning-blasted skeleton of a tree, a fitting haunt for "fairies, black, grey, green and

CHAPTER I. 1851

white," and a very favourite goal of our expeditions. As he walked along with that peculiar dancing step of his, his eyes gleaming with enthusiasm, and his hair, like the Zazzera of the old Florentines, tossed about by the wind, he would pour out in his unforgettable voice the treasures which he had gathered at his last sitting. Other boys would watch him with amazement, looking upon him as a sort of inspired elfin-something belonging to another sphere. . . . He carried with him one magic charm—he was absolutely courageous. He did not know what fear meant.

Swinburne spent four years and a half at school, and his attitude to Eton has been variously appraised. But the late Vice-Provost (Francis Warre Cornish) and many others have attested to the warmth of his feeling for the school, and the kindliness of his reminiscences. As has been excellently pointed out, he was not made of the stuff which moulds the enthusiastic schoolboy, and yet the old traditions and chivalrous memories of Eton sank into the depths of his soul. His Commemoration Ode of 1891 records with glowing hyperbole the unfading devotion of a lifetime, and he never lost his tender and wistful affection for the Forest, the Brocas, Cuckoo Weir, and the school library.

Still the reaches of the river, still the light on field and hill,
Still the memories held aloft as lamps for hope's young fire to fill,
Shine, and while the light of England lives shall shine for England still.

These lines were inscribed on the great wreath of ilex and laurel, sent to his burial in 1909, " with grateful homage from Eton," and nothing would

have pleased him better than this tribute from the school to which he looked back with unfailing happiness. Every word he said in gratitude to Eton may be contrasted with his bitter references to Oxford.[1]

In those days the discipline of athletics was not rigidly enforced, and Swinburne played no games. His references to football are perfunctory. We are told that he never possessed a cricket bat. On the other hand, he could swim and walk for ever. As the sea at Bonchurch, so at Eton the river took up a great deal of his attention. He "passed" early in 1851, and "passing" means, as all Etonians know, much to the schoolboy swimmer. In later years Algernon used to dwell fondly on the various stages of his apprenticeship — Cuckoo Weir, and Upper Hope, and Athens, and finally that glorious lasher and test of the finished athlete, Boveney Weir. In the summer holidays of 1851, Sir George Young stayed with the Swinburnes at Bonchurch. Algernon was consumed by a passion for the sea, and, in their daily bathes in the cove at East Dene, used to make the gardener push the jumping-stage further into the surf than his friend and schoolfellow, though a skilful swimmer, quite enjoyed.

Swinburne's third year at Eton was marked by a considerable development of his mental powers, and by the awakening of a certain ambition. In this year, 1852, after reading much French

[1] All that has been said here about Eton had the advantage of being revised by my valued and lamented friend, Francis Warre Cornish, who died on the 28th August 1916. He was particularly anxious to repel the assumption that Swinburne was not happy at Eton.

CHAPTER I. 1852

with Henry Tarver, he won the second Prince Consort's prize for French and Italian, and got "sent up for good" for his Greek elegiacs. On this last feat he constantly dwelt with a fond complacency, and for many years he kept this copy of Greek verse carefully. He lent this and an earlier exercise in elegiacs to Lord Houghton in 1864, but they are no longer forthcoming.

In after years, Swinburne plainly stated that he destroyed "root and branch" every specimen of his English verses written before he went to Oxford. It is certain that he thought he had "burnt every scrap," yet one poem of over two hundred lines escaped him and still exists in MS. This is "The Triumph of Gloriana," which was probably written in 1851. It is an exercise in couplets, describing a visit of Queen Victoria to Eton, "the Temple of Loyalty." No touch of realism enables us to guess what particular visit is intended. "Forth from the moated castle" of Windsor "troops pass out," escorting "the fairy dame" to Eton's "secret sanctuary," and back again. The diction of the piece is purely eighteenth century, and seems to be founded, like the versification, on a reverent study of Pope's *Homer*, with a touch of *The Pleasures of Memory* thrown in. There is not the slightest indication that the author was acquainted with any of the poets of the seventeenth or the nineteenth centuries. The verse is smooth, monotonous, and diversified by frequent alexandrines. A boyish sneer at Harrow, "Wrapt in a mist the Theban mountain lies,"—Eton being "bright

Athens,"—is the only sparkle in a dull mass of imitative correctness. Not a foot, not a syllable, reveals the coming genius. The only quality of the coming Swinburne which "The Triumph of Gloriana" exemplifies is his marvellous power of sustained imitation at will.

It is particularly important to notice that almost all Swinburne's literary convictions were formed while he was at school. We have already seen that this was the case with the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists. In like manner the passion for Victor Hugo began in 1852, being started by the reading of *Notre-Dame de Paris* with Tarver. Long afterwards, speaking of Hugo in a private letter, Swinburne remarked, "A Eton je m'enivrais de ses drames." Some months earlier than this he had fallen under the spell of Landor, and in particular of the *Hellenics*. He told Landor, when he saw him at Florence in 1864, that "his poems had first given him inexplicable pleasure and a sort of blind relief when he was a small fellow of twelve." He added that his "first recollection of them" was of "The Song of the Hours" in the *Iphigenia*. This is the chorus beginning, "To each an urn we bring," and it is difficult to think of a lyric less likely to appeal to the ear of a child. Nothing could show more remarkably the precocious ripeness of judgment of this boy of less than thirteen than that, without contemporary opinion to guide him or a friend to indicate his course, he should unwaveringly discover in "The Hamadryad" and "Acon and Rhodope" beauty of a higher class than in any of the idyllic poems of Tennyson which were

CHAPTER I. 1852

then so extravagantly in fashion. Walter Savage Landor became spontaneously the—

> . . . name set for love apart,
> Held lifelong in my heart,

for whom for more than half a century no eulogy was to be too ardent, no moral and intellectual gratitude too tender. It was under the auspices of Marlowe, and Landor, and Hugo, strange idols for a little boy at an English public school, that Swinburne used to take long walks in Windsor Forest, always with a single friend, " dancing as he went, and reciting from his inexhaustible memory the works which he had been studying in his favourite sunlighted window."

To such a nature, holidays afforded the same stimulus as school, and perhaps in a purer form. Through these years, Algernon appeared to those who saw him at home to be more, and not less, of a child than his age proclaimed him. He led a life like that of the stainless occupants of Paradise, in a perpetual frolic on the downs, in the gardens, by the sea of the Isle of Wight or of Northumberland. This felicity was diversified by visits to Northcourt, and to Ashburnham Place, where Algernon adopted airs of chivalrous protection to his little cousin and playfellow, Lady Katherine, with whom, each mounted on a robust pony, he took endless rides in the forest. Another cousin, Mrs. Disney Leith, has recorded that he was now, as always, a reckless although a fearless rider, and he was not infrequently thrown from having lapsed into a dreamy half-unconsciousness, but never with serious results.

Charles Dickens, staying at Bonchurch, noted with approval "the golden-haired lad of the Swinburnes," who played so gracefully and gaily with his own boys. All the evidence points to the fairy-like sprightliness and unearthly charm of this wonderful child over whose bliss no shadow of a cloud had yet passed, or seemed likely to pass.

The great simplicity of the boy, and his absence of affectation, rendered still more singular the contrast between this puerile, or almost infantile, gaiety and insouciance and the intense seriousness of his attitude towards the intellectual and imaginative domains. This fay tripping in the sunshine was already, in several directions, erudite far beyond his years, and in particular he had accepted, with perfect consciousness and for the rest of his life, ambitions, aims, adorations, which were diametrically opposed to the experience and hopes of all who surrounded him. It was no part of the scheme of happiness which his family planned for him that he should be a republican and a poet of the Hugo and Landor type.

Meanwhile, it is not certain in what year, but probably in 1852, Lady Jane Swinburne solemnly presented him to one from whom no dangerous influences could be anticipated, and whose example might be advantageous. This was Samuel Rogers, who had refused the Laureateship at the death of Wordsworth on account of his own advanced age. Lady Jane said that she had ventured to bring her son to visit Mr. Rogers, "because he thinks

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more of poets than of any other people in the world." The sagacious old author of *The Pleasures of Memory* was greatly touched, and at the close of the interview he solemnly laid his hand on Algernon's head, and said, "I prophesy that you will be a poet too!" This visit did not lead Swinburne to reject *Odes et Ballades* in favour of *Italy*, but it stimulated his sense of the hieratic dignity of poets. Mr. Rogers was perhaps hardly a primate of song, but he was accredited in the service of Apollo, and he was extremely venerable. The interview, by Swinburne's own later declaration, confirmed the boy in his poetic calling.

It has been said that at Eton he had an extraordinarily wide knowledge of the Greek poets, and that he read them with ease in the original. His closest school-friend insists that this is incorrect, or should be reserved for the record of his advanced Oxford life. We are told that he left Eton knowing no more Greek than any intelligent schoolboy should, and the unquestioned success of his elegiacs was due more to his extraordinary gift of imitation than to any precocious familiarity with the Greek language. The mediocrity of his record, on arriving at Oxford, bears out this view. It is certain, however, that he was devoted to that charming anthology, the old Eton *Poetae Graeci*, to which he owed his earliest introduction to Theocritus and Alcaeus, and on which was founded his lifelong passion for Sappho. Long afterwards, as Mr. A. G. C. Liddell has reported, he was accustomed to say that the *Poetae Graeci* "had played a large part in fostering the love of poetry in his

mind." He is said by another schoolfellow to have complained that he found Theocritus "the hardest Greek lesson of the week," the lyric poets already attracting him far more vividly than the bucolic. His appreciation of Latin poetry was less cordial than his love of Greek, and remained so all his life. Catullus alone gave him pleasure of an ecstatic kind. Horace he disliked, and Lucretius bored him. In after years, when Raper expressed wonder that Swinburne did not enjoy the poetry of Virgil, greatest of all masters of alliteration and assonation, he replied that it was due to his having been made to learn that poet by heart at Eton. He said he liked to wait till a poet learned *him* by heart, and took possession of his soul as Sappho had done. He attributed his want of sympathy with most of the Latin classics to his having been forced to repeat them under compulsion.

The accounts of Algernon's behaviour in childhood and as a schoolboy have reached us through the memories of those who regarded him with love and admiration, but they are unanimous in representing him as unaggressive and self-contained, gentle, courteous, and gay. Lord Redesdale tells me that at school he was what is picturesquely called "a bag of nerves," and that the smallest obstacle ruffled him. But, although so irritable, he was not overbearing. It is highly probable that the arrogance which marred certain phases of his middle life, was absent in his childhood as it vanished from his serene old age. These superficial faults, excrescences upon his native character, were without

CHAPTER I. 1852

question the result of a disturbance of his nervous system, which had not begun at Eton. From earliest childhood he had the trick, whenever he grew the least excited, of stiffly drawing down his arms from his shoulders and giving quick vibrating jerks with his hands. His family always insisted that he spoilt his shoulders and made them sloping by this trick which dragged them down. If he happened to be seated at a moment of excitement, he would jerk his legs and twist his feet also, though with less violence. At such times his face would grow radiant with a rapt expression, very striking to witness. All this developed itself in early childhood, and alarmed his mother, who applied to a specialist for advice. After a close examination the physician's report was that these motions resulted from "an excess of electric vitality," and that any attempt to stop them would be harmful. Accordingly, to the very end of his life, whenever Swinburne was happy, or interested, or amused, he jerked his arms and fluttered his little delicate hands.

A certain change took place in Swinburne's character at the opening of his last year at school. He became less amenable to discipline and idler at his work. Francis Warre Cornish, when he was a new boy early in 1853, had the poet pointed out to him as "Mad Swinburne," and he tells me that he has never forgotten the impression he received of the strange figure. Through the summer of 1853 Swinburne had increasing trouble with Joynes of a rebellious kind, and in consequence of some representations he did not return to

Eton, although nothing had been said during the previous half about his leaving, and although at the last he seemed to be doing particularly well. When he left school he was within a few places of the headmaster's division. He had now entered his seventeenth year.

Immediately after leaving Eton, Swinburne met, at the house of Miss Elizabeth Sewell and her sisters, Ashcliffe, Bonchurch, an Italian lady who was staying in the Isle of Wight. This was Signora Annunziata Fronduti, who still survives in her eighty-fifth year, and who now resides at Gubbio, in Umbria. Miss Fronduti was greatly impressed by the simplicity of the boy, whose "great shock of red hair, fits of silence, and earnest *gaucherie*" she still vividly recalls. She discovered that he had a passion for Italian poetry, and she exercised for his benefit her practised gifts of reading and recitation. He would "make her do it by the hour," and would sit gazing into space, absolutely transfigured and absorbed by the magic and the music of the classic Italian verse. Signora Fronduti remembers that on these occasions his great eyes were filled with a sort of devouring flame—"for the poetry, not the reciter," as she naïvely protests. It seems to have been Dante that she chiefly read to him, as Ariosto had already been introduced to him by Lady Jane Swinburne. Signora Annunziata Fronduti was a friend of Lord Houghton, and it is possible that it was she who, in 1860, made Algernon known to him. I have to thank Miss Janet H. Blunt for having kindly made this communication to me.

CHAPTER II

OXFORD

(1853–1859)

Chapter II. 1853

Algernon Swinburne left school in the summer of 1853, and he matriculated at Balliol College, Oxford, on the 24th of January 1856. How he spent these two years and a half is not at present very clear. He was sixteen when he left Eton and he was nearly nineteen when he went to the University. These are important years in the life of most active and original minds, but we have no evidence that they left much trace upon his. There is reason to believe that at the back of his head, when he made further stay at Eton impossible for him, was the passionate wish to be trained for the army. He would have turned out to be a singular field-officer, it must be presumed, yet cavalry was what he was after. He saw himself galloping to the destruction of kings on a charger as black as night. He said himself that the Balaklava Charge (Oct. 25, 1854) "eclipsed all other visions," and the date of this proves that the desire to be a *beau sabreur* was no passing one. "To be prepared for such a chance as that was the one dream of my life." And, so late as 1891, he told Edward Burne-Jones that "the cavalry

service" had been the ideal of his early hopes. His mother was not altogether against the plan, and on one occasion, probably late in 1854, the question was finally pressed by Algernon to a family decision. The parents took three days to think the matter over, and then told the boy it could not be. "My father resolutely stamped out my ambition for a soldier's work," on account, mainly, of the slightness and shortness of his son's figure. But Swinburne continued to regret the military profession, until some twenty years afterwards, when, in commenting to me on his growing deafness, he added with a sigh, "So that, after all, I suppose I should not have done well to be a soldier!"

He was prepared for Oxford, in a desultory way, by the Rev. John Wilkinson, perpetual curate of Cambo in Northumberland, which was his grandfather's parish. This worthy man lamented that the lad was too clever by half, and would never study. By far the greater part of these years seems to have been spent out of doors, on the Northumbrian moor and sea-coast, in the forest at Ashburnham, or upon the southern shores of the Isle of Wight. Around Capheaton the boy rode indefatigably, often in the sympathetic company of a cousin, and "many a masterpiece of the Victorian poets was recited—during a spirited canter or a leisurely saunter on horseback through those beautiful Northumbrian roads or fields." About the middle of Christmas 1854 (if we may trust the reference to Balaklava), it suddenly came upon him that it was all very well to fancy or dream of "deadly danger" and

CHAPTER II. 1854

forlorn hopes and cavalry charges, when he had never run any greater risk than a football "rouge," and so he determined to scale the Culver as "a chance of testing my nerve in face of death which could not be surpassed." Culver Cliff is the eastern headland of the Isle of Wight, a great face of chalk picturesquely striated with bands of flint. It was a precipice impregnable from the sea-foot, or at least Swinburne believed that it had never been so climbed by a human being. He performed the feat, which he described in a letter published by Mrs. Disney Leith shortly after his death. The story is admirably told, and closes with a domestic touch which is delightful. The deed of daring could not be concealed from his mother:

> Of course she wanted to know why I had done such a thing, and when I told her she laughed a short, sweet laugh most satisfactory to the young ear, and said, "Nobody ever thought you were a coward, my boy." I said that was all very well, but how could I tell till I tried? "But you won't do it again?" she said. I replied, of course not—where could be the fun? I knew now that it could be done, and I only wanted to do it because nobody thought it could.

A good deal of highly autobiographical colour may be gleaned from the drama of *The Sisters* (1892), where Redgie Clavering, to those who know him, is largely Algernon Swinburne's recollection of himself as a youth of eighteen. Here we have the tendency "to ride forbidden horses, and break bounds on days forbidden"; the passion for "a swim against a charging sea,"

until "a breaker got you down"; the "light, soft, shining, curly hair, too boyish for his years"; the study of "Dodsley's great old plays"; the fretting at an enforced idleness. The scene is laid alternately in Northumberland, and in a southern garden by the sea, full of nightingales and roses. But above all, here is the hero, not long come from Eton, full of poetry and ambition, but yearning more than for all other things for the experience of a soldier or a sailor, and fuming because he is considered "not old enough to serve." And there are other points, even more intimate, in the sum of which the figure of Reginald Clavering is revealed as a close and conscious portrait of the poet as he saw himself, looking back over thirty-seven years. In this we are not left to conjecture, for in writing to Mrs. Lynn Linton (Oct. 16, 1892), he said that he "never wrote anything so autobiographical as Redgie's speech about Northumberland in the Eton midsummer holidays":

> The crowning county of England—yes, the best! . . .
> Have you and I, then, raced across its moors
> Till horse and boy were well-nigh mad with glee
> So often, summer and winter, home from school,
> And not found that out? Take the streams away,
> The country would be sweeter than the south
> Anywhere: give the south our streams, would it
> Be fit to match our borders? Flower and crag,
> Burnside and boulder, heather and whin,—you don't
> Dream you can match them south of this? And then
> If all the unwater'd country were as flat
> As the Eton playing-fields, give it back our burns,
> And set them singing through a sad south world
> And try to make them dismal as its fens,—
> They won't be.

CHAPTER II. 1855

And to Edward Burne-Jones he wrote (Oct. 15, 1892), "I think I have succeeded in making a nice young fellow out of my own recollections and aspirations."

Swinburne had passed the age of eighteen when, in 1855, he went abroad for the first time, spending several weeks in Germany in the company of his uncle, General Thomas Ashburnham (d. 1872). He was not then nor in later life attracted by the German language or literature, and his works contain scarce a reference to that country. What did on this occasion impress him was the return voyage from Ostend (by a slip of memory called "Calais" in a poem of his old age). About midnight the packet was caught in mid-channel by a thunderstorm strong enough to delay her some three good hours over the due time. This storm haunted the poet's memory, and was described by him repeatedly, in prose and verse, almost until the end of his life. The version given in his review of *L'Homme qui rit*, written fourteen years after the experience, is perhaps the finest specimen extant of Swinburne's descriptive prose, with its "race and riot of lights, beautiful and rapid as a course of shining Oceanides along the tremulous floor of the sea." He was fond of saying that the spectacle of this storm touched his nerves "with a more vivid pleasure than music or wine," and that it raised his spirit "to the very summit of vision and delight." The recurrent effect upon him of this particular scene is characteristic. Swinburne did not live, like Wordsworth, in a perpetual communion with nature, but exceptional and even rare moments

of concentrated observation wakened in him an ecstasy which he was then careful to brood upon, to revive, and perhaps at last to exaggerate. As a rule he saw little of the world around him, but what he did see was presented to him in a blaze of lime-light.

Mrs. Disney Leith informs me that Algernon was finally prepared for college by James Russell Woodford (1820–85), afterwards Bishop of Ely, but then vicar of Kempsford, near Fairford in Gloucestershire. I remember Swinburne's speaking of Woodford with great cordiality some twenty years later.

During the three years and a half which Swinburne spent at Oxford, Robert Scott was the Master of his college. But there is no evidence that he impressed his individuality on Swinburne in any degree whatever, and, as Lord Bryce reminds me, the head of an Oxford College in those days was very little in touch with undergraduates. In 1856 the peculiarly favourable conditions afterwards enjoyed by Balliol had hardly begun to develop. Jowett, who had failed to secure the Mastership in 1854, had been appointed Regius Professor of Greek in the following year, but at the moment when Swinburne appeared at the University, Jowett was still the centre of disagreeable contention, and exposed to attacks on the ground of heresy. He was becoming more and more valued by the younger dons in Balliol itself, but his schemes for reform were still much debated and his personal intervention opposed. It was later that Jowett began to take a place in Swinburne's life, and it

CHAPTER II. 1856

is to be observed that the latter always insisted upon a distinction which throws an important light upon his attitude to the college. He used to say, very firmly, that the Master of Balliol was officially a stranger to him, but Mr. Jowett an honoured and lifelong friend.

Of Swinburne's conduct as a freshman little has as yet been revealed, and perhaps there was little to reveal.

The earliest impressions of him which I have been able to collect are those of Mr. Donald Crawford, who has been obliging enough to put down his recollections for me. Mr. Crawford came to Balliol in the October term of 1856, and made Swinburne's acquaintance immediately. They belonged to different college groups, but they were in the habit of taking Sunday walks together. Swinburne took no part in the ordinary outdoor amusements, and never appeared at wine-parties or at breakfasts; he remained much in his rooms. It was presently announced that he was "writing poetry," and even "engaged upon a tragedy." (This was doubtless much later.) Fragments of his verse were occasionally repeated, but were "not much appreciated by the rank and file of the college," and indeed were thought very ridiculous. Mr. Crawford's recollection of Swinburne's appearance during his first year at college is valuable:

> A slight girlish figure, below the middle height, with a great shock of red hair, which seemed almost to touch his narrow sloping shoulders. He had the pallor which often goes with red hair. There was a dainty grace about his appearance, but it was disappointing that,

like some figure in a Pre-Raphaelite canvas, where he would not have been out of place, there was a want of youthful freshness in his face. He walked delicately, like Agag, with a mounting gait, as if picking his steps. He had a pleasant musical voice, and his manner and address, slightly shy and reserved, had a particular charm of refinement and good breeding.

He seems, apart from his striking physical appearance, to have attracted no sort of attention at Oxford, either among undergraduates or dons. One contemporary tells me that he lost about this time the fairy delicacy of his features and complexion, and became "very ugly"; the same informant says that he "recovered his good looks later." But this is categorically denied by Professor T. E. Holland, who writes to me, "I never thought him ugly, or that his appearance altered." It is vaguely reported that he was, as a freshman, "very reserved" and "rather sullen"; and still more vaguely that he passed through a recrudescence of Anglican ritualism. Professor Holland remembers that he first heard of him as "a most promising young fellow," who, it was feared, had developed an admiration of Charles I., and a tendency toward High Church practices. He was a brand to be plucked out of the fire by the Old Mortality.[1] This is possible, for many of his contemporaries went through it, but on the other hand Lord Bryce saw no trace of it in 1858 when he first knew him, and he now doubts it. Keats has reminded us that "the imagination of a boy is healthy, and the mature imagination of a man is healthy; but there is a space of life between, in which the soul is in a

[1] See p. 38.

CHAPTER II. 1856

ferment." This was doubtless the case with Swinburne at the age of nineteen. He would feel himself solitary and undecided, conscious of latent powers which nobody suspected, and of ambitions which nobody comprehended. For the ordinary pursuits of young men at college he had a silent disdain, and did not encourage tutorial hopes by any application to the round of studies. Meanwhile, he was following his own course, devouring the literature of five languages and revolving a vast system of dreams.

Before leaving home for Oxford, Swinburne burned " every scrap of MS. he had in the world," and during his life as a freshman we do not hear of his attempting composition, for Mr. Crawford's recollection probably refers to 1858.

It was much to be observed that in later life, though he spoke often and in affectionate terms of Eton, Swinburne was never betrayed into the smallest commendation of Oxford. He was, indeed, unwilling to mention the University, and if obliged to do so, it was with a gesture of impatience and a reference to " the foggy damp of Oxonian atmosphere." Long afterwards, in late middle life, he railed against Matthew Arnold for his " effusive Oxonolatry," and earlier he had contrived to analyse and commend " The Scholar-Gipsy " and " Thyrsis " without so much as naming the " sweet city with her dreaming spires " which is the very substance of those poems. He used to express the view that an Oxford resident never dies, having never lived, but ceases. Much misapprehension, much exasperation, must have gone to build up Swin-

burne's dislike of Oxford, for he yielded as little as Dryden did to "the gross flattery of universities," and the more he knew of Oxford the more he seemed to hate it. He disliked the ecclesiastical side thoroughly; and of course was out of sympathy with ordinary undergraduate life. Lord Bryce remembers seeing him once in a canoe, navigating it with considerable difficulty.

Towards the beginning of his second year he began to make friends, who were all, so far as we can perceive, older than himself. Apparently the earliest of these was Edwin Hatch, who, a nonconformist undergraduate of Pembroke College, had recently entered the Church of England, and was attracting a good deal of notice in Oxford. Hatch was already writing much for periodicals and dictionaries, and must have been the earliest practising man of letters known to Swinburne. He was a great organiser, and he had instituted in his college a sort of Brotherhood of Letters, in which Swinburne shyly took some part. Hatch introduced him to a future poet and a future painter, to Richard Watson Dixon and to Spencer Stanhope; but each of these men was Swinburne's senior by four years. John Nichol of Glasgow, since 1855 at Balliol College, was also of their age, but he formed a closer tie with Swinburne, founded on deeper community of interest than Hatch showed. Another very early friend was Thomas Hill Green, the future philosopher, who was a year older than Swinburne, and had entered Balliol College in October 1855. Green, who was inactive and shy, gave as yet to the

dons little promise of a brilliant future, but he and Swinburne had a good deal to say to one another, and much fun to communicate, during the long country walks in which they both delighted. Swinburne had some few still older friends in Oxford. One, for whom he expressed a warm admiration, was Manuel John Johnson, the astronomer (1805–59), then keeper of the Radcliffe Observatory. It was Nichol who drew the attention of Jowett to Swinburne's remarkable qualities; and by its own maturity and fulness the mind of Nichol exercised a strong influence over that of Swinburne, not altogether in a useful direction, since, while the ardour and intellectual independence of the young Scotchman were sympathetic, he was ready to encourage and so exaggerate some of Swinburne's weaknesses.

On the other hand, Swinburne attributed to Nichol's teaching a steadying influence on his own intellect, and in 1859 declared that he had received "valuable help in the study of Logic" from him, naïvely adding that this was "in a space of time necessarily short." Nichol did not make many friends, and he was afflicted by a sort of Carlylese moroseness; but later on this passed away, and Nichol became prominent in the counsels of the Old Mortality Society, which was founded by him in November 1856, and which at first circled round himself. It was founded for the purpose of affording to its members "such intellectual pastime and recreation as should seem most suitable and agreeable." To belong to the Old Mortality became a considerable distinction, for the six original members were—besides

Nichol and Swinburne—Dicey, George Rankine Luke ("our chief of men in our college days," whose career of high promise was cut short by drowning in the Isis in 1862), George Birkbeck Hill, and Algernon Grenfell; while T. H. Green, Pater, J. A. Symonds, Bywater, Caird, and those eminent survivors, Professor Holland and Lord Bryce, were afterwards included.[1] The society met in one another's rooms once a week in term-time, and read either essays or passages chosen by the host. The meetings, Professor Holland tells me, invariably took place after dinner, over cups of coffee. Although Nichol avoided general companionship, he was very assiduous in cultivating his particular friends. Who these were have just been mentioned, and there exists a large photographic group of them, where Swinburne is discovered near the centre of the front, a prominence which he owes, no doubt, to his diminutive size. Of his contributions to debate none are preserved, but we learn that on the 13th of February 1857, during the absence of Nichol, who was ill, Swinburne praised the satiric genius of Dryden to the detriment of that of Pope and Byron.

Lord Bryce remembers a meeting in Swinburne's rooms in 1858, at which the host read Browning's essay prefixed to the forged *Letters* of Shelley; and afterwards repeated, or rather

[1] Professor T. E. Holland has very kindly given me a list of all the members of the Old Mortality. "A body of twenty rules was adopted at a meeting held on the 2nd of May 1857, when the discussion turned upon Hume's Essay in defence of Suicide." The Society seems to have come to an end in 1876, at a dinner at All Souls College, to which Swinburne was invited, but after accepting, failed to turn up.

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chanted, to his friends a few of Browning's poems, in particular, "The Statue and the Bust," "The Heretic's Tragedy," and "Bishop Blougram's Apology." Of those present only Swinburne himself and Nichol had, so far as Lord Bryce can recall, ever read any of Browning's poems. Two or three years later everybody was reading them. Swinburne had in those days an immense admiration for Ruskin. Lord Bryce recollects that one Sunday afternoon, when he dropped in upon him, Swinburne took down a volume and read aloud, with admirable expression, a long description of an old boat lying on the shore, and of all it had been and had seen.

Already Swinburne knew far more of English poetical literature than either Nichol or any other of the group, and stood alone among them as widely read in French and Italian. Nichol once remarked to Lord Bryce, "He is the one among us who certainly has genius." No one of his friends of the Old Mortality doubted that; the only question was whether his strange erratic mind would ever concentrate itself upon the production of a large piece of work. Already Swinburne was curiously detached from most of the common interests of humanity. T. H. Green was accustomed to chuckle as he described a meeting of the Old Mortality, where he read an essay on the development of Christian Dogma. He happened to look up once from his paper, and nearly burst out laughing at the sight of Swinburne, whose face wore an expression compounded of unutterable ennui and naïf astonishment that men whom he respected could take interest in such a subject.

The year 1857 saw a considerable ripening of Swinburne's intellectual powers. He hesitated now no longer, but took up the attitude towards life in which he was to persist. His wonderful old grandfather at Capheaton encouraged him to adopt extreme views in politics, telling the lad how, in years long past, he had "repeatedly" made himself "liable to be impeached and executed for high treason" by the outspoken republicanism of his sentiments. The enthusiasm so engendered took a somewhat ludicrous shape in Algernon's private behaviour, for Mr. Lyulph Stanley (now Lord Sheffield), who entered Balliol College a little later than he, remembers that the poet had a portrait of Mazzini hanging in the place of honour in his sitting-room, and that he declaimed verses before it, with gestures of adoring supplication.

In all this advanced republicanism, if his grandfather encouraged him, he was still more actively abetted by John Nichol, who was a pronounced disciple of Mazzini and loathed Napoleon III. Professor A. V. Dicey writes: "As regards Louis Napoleon we were all agreed. I see little reason to think that we were wrong in our general estimate of the Emperor; but there is something amusing, as I look back upon them, in the youthful vehemence of our denunciations." There was no support of Napoleon III. in the "Old Mortality," but Swinburne outdid all the rest in his fantastic violence. Professor Holland writes me: "I well recollect his dancing round the table, screaming abuse, and, I think, advocating the assassination of the Emperor."

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Some of the verses that he intoned before the portrait may doubtless be identified with the *Ode to Mazzini*, found incomplete after Swinburne's death, and printed in 1909 by Mr. T. J. Wise.[1] By internal evidence, this irregular Pindaric can be dated with confidence in the spring of 1857. It shows the influence of Shelley, but already there is a personal note of Swinburne in it, and some felicitous passages, such as:

> The winds, that fold around
> Her soft enchanted ground
> Their wings of music, sadden into song;
> The holy stars await
> Some dawn of glimmering fate
> In silence—but the time of pain is long,
> But here no comfort stills
> This sorrow that o'erclouds the purple hills.

About the same time, doubtless through the help of Nichol, Swinburne appeared in print for the first time, contributing an article on Congreve to a popular dictionary. This, still more than the *Ode to Mazzini*, is stiff and rather dry; it gives no sort of promise of its author's coming affluence of phrase.

At the outset of the Long Vacation of 1857, William Morris, who had been in London for some months, reappeared in Oxford in connection with an ambitious artistic scheme. He visited the Brotherhood at Pembroke College, and Hatch presented Swinburne to him at Birkbeck Hill's rooms on the 1st of November. The artistic scheme was the decoration of the bays of the

[1] Another MS., which supplied the missing passages, turned up in 1916.

Debating Room of the Union, which D. G. Rossetti had persuaded the architect, Benjamin Woodward, to entrust to himself and his friends. These included Burne-Jones and William Morris, who formed a triple alliance. It appears to have been Hatch who introduced Swinburne to Rossetti and Burne-Jones while they were at work in the Union.[1] The result was so happy that Burne-Jones exclaimed, "We have hitherto been three, and now there are four of us." No one whom Swinburne had ever met seemed to him so wonderful as Rossetti, and he enjoyed his "cordial kindness and exuberant generosity" from the first. But the difference in their ages, and a certain magnificence of manner on the part of Rossetti, kept Swinburne for the present at a respectful but increasingly adoring distance. His real intimacy with Rossetti did not begin until after he left Oxford. With Morris, to whose conversation Swinburne owed the opening of new fields of intellectual pleasure, and particularly an introduction to the romance of mediaeval France, he was from the first on the footing of a devoted younger brother. He told Mr. S. C. Cockerell that when Morris read to him, in 1857, his just-written "The Haystack in the Floods," the poignancy and splendour of the ending caused him an anguish which was more than his nerves were able to bear.

He was more at his ease at once with Dixon and Burne-Jones, although he was not in time

[1] This incident has been related otherwise, and even by Mr. W. M. Rossetti; but I find among Swinburne's MSS. a note in which he says (November 27, 1886), "Rossetti did not know me 'through Burne-Jones'; I was introduced to them both at the same time."

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to take part in the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, in which they fledged their fancies. But in December 1857, when the periodical called *Undergraduate Papers* was started into brief life as the organ of the "Old Mortality," under the Editorship of Nichol, Swinburne was a contributor, together with Luke, Birkbeck Hill and Dicey. Swinburne's "crudities," as he afterwards called them, were four in number, and the themes of them were highly characteristic. They included an essay on Marlowe and Webster; a long canto of Pre-Raphaelite triplets called *Queen Iseult*; a "boyish bit of burlesque," being a mock-review of poems of a supposed Ernest Wheldrake, a "spasmodist,"—this was a trick which he afterwards repeated, more than once attempting in 1862 to entrap the too wary editor of the *Spectator*; and a perfectly amazing blast of scorn (in prose) against the Emperor of the French and his horde of servile priests, called "Church Imperialism." There was not very much positive merit or even promise in these productions, which were only remarkable, as the work of a youth of nearly twenty-one, as showing the bent of his mind in several directions. *Queen Iseult*, Swinburne's earliest narrative poem, is notable for its purity of diction, for the effect on it of William Morris's still unpublished verse, and for its independence of all the recognised poetical fashions of that day, when *Maud*, *Men and Women* and *Aurora Leigh* were the poetical works pre-eminently before the public; but it has no inherent value. *Undergraduate Papers* had to cease with its third number (March-

April 1858), because the Editor's leisure was absorbed by Degree work, but he boasted, with an honest pride, that "we paid the contributors at the usual rate," as long as the periodical lasted.

Swinburne had not found his true voice at the end of 1857. He found it, however, in the beginning of 1858. The subject given for the Newdigate Prize Poem for March of that year was "The Discovery of the North-West Passage," and Swinburne competed. He was not known in later years to make the slightest reference to the fact that he had entered the lists on this occasion and had been vanquished. He had every reason to suppose that his unlucky Newdigate had disappeared, but his father had secreted the original MS. and it was discovered at the death of Miss Isabel Swinburne. Lord Bryce recollects that the Old Mortality were indignant that the prize was awarded, not to Algernon, but to a Mr. Francis Law Latham, of Brasenose College, whose name has never been heard of since, at all events in connection with the Muses. It seems extraordinary that the examiners should not have perceived the merits of Swinburne's poem, which lift it far above the general level of praiseworthy prize-compositions, but it is possible that a pedantic objection was made to it. The subject as publicly announced was "The Discovery of the North-West Passage," but Swinburne deals exclusively with the fate of Franklin and his companions. That the whole expedition was lost was by that time universally accepted, although it was not until

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the return of M'Clintock in October 1859 that full particulars of Franklin's death were made known.

The force and dignity of Swinburne's verses on this theme of universal public discussion are worthy of high praise. He rose to the level of his theme in a poem which will always be worthy of a place in his collected writings. In "The Death of Sir John Franklin" there is, on the one hand, an absence of juvenile affectation and oddity, and on the other the presence of unusual purity of diction, elevation of thought, and melody of versification. Hardly a feeble phrase reveals the undergraduate, not a single crudity the Pre-Raphaelite. Here was discovered, if the Oxford examiners had but had the wit to perceive it, a new element in English poetry. Nothing in the verse of the age had prepared them for such numbers as these :

What praise shall England give these men her friends ?
For while the bays and the large channels flow
In the broad sea between the iron ends
Of the pois'd world where no safe sail may be,
And for white miles the hard ice never blends
With the chill wasting edges of dull sea,—
And while to praise her green and girdled land
Shall be the same as to praise Liberty,—
So long the record of these men shall stand,
Because they chose not life but rather death,
Each side being weighed with a most equal hand,—
Because the gift they had of English breath
They did give back to England for her sake,
Like those dead seamen of Elizabeth,
And those that wrought with Nelson or with Blake,
To do great England service their lives long,—
High honour shall they have.

The Arctic scenery, to which Swinburne never had occasion to revert, provides some striking passages :

> For the laborious time went hard with these
> Among the thousand colours and gaunt shapes
> Of the strong ice cloven with breach of seas,
> Where the waste sullen shadow of steep capes
> Narrows across the cloudy-coloured brine,
> And by strong jets the anger'd foam escapes,
> And a sad touch of sun scores the sea-line
> Right at the middle motion of the noon,
> And then fades sharply back, and the cliffs shine
> Fierce with keen snows against a kindled moon,
> In the hard purple of the bitter sky.

There can be no question that the rejection of the poem on which he had expended so much enthusiastic labour was an element in the repulsion which Swinburne conceived for Oxford, and for the languor with which he now regarded his further career in the University.

In the course of the summer of this year in Northumberland, Algernon was much observed. At Wallington were then living the geologist, Sir Walter C. Trevelyan (1797–1879) and his wife, Pauline, Lady Trevelyan, the latter a friend and patron of Rossetti, and a great admirer of Ruskin, who frequently stayed at Wallington. As neighbours of the Capheaton household, the Trevelyans made Algernon's acquaintance, and he became accustomed more and more often to tear round to Wallington on his pony that he might pour out his confidences to Lady Trevelyan. Here he made the acquaintance of Ruskin, who thought him extremely exhilarating, and of William Bell Scott, then a middle-aged drawing-master work-

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ing at Newcastle, who, seeing Swinburne capering on horseback, drew Ruskin's attention to the marvellous resemblance he bore to Uccello's portrait of Galeazzo Malatesta, with his aureole of fiery hair and his pale arrogant face, in the "Battle of Sant' Egidio" picture in the National Gallery.

For the next eight years, until Lady Trevelyan's death, her friendship was an inestimable benefit to Algernon Swinburne. She was the first person outside the circle of his own family who took the trouble to study and had the wit to appreciate him. Sir George Otto Trevelyan (of Wallington), who is the son of the first cousin of Sir Walter Trevelyan (of Nettlecombe) and the present possessor of Wallington, has been so kind as to give me some particulars of his kinswoman.[1] He says: "Pauline, Lady Trevelyan, was a woman of singular and unique charm; quiet and quaint in manner, nobly emotional, ingrainedly artistic, very wise and sensitive, with an everflowing spring of the most delicious humour. No friend of hers, man or woman, could ever have enough of her company; and those friends were many, and included the first people of the day in every province of distinction. She was Algernon Swinburne's good angel; and he regarded her with 'filial' feelings. It was a very real and permanent misfortune for him that Pauline Trevelyan died in middle life in the summer of 1866; and sad it was for me too, since she was a second mother to me who was so rich in that blessing already. Widely, and almost

[1] Given in full in Appendix II.

absurdly different as we two young men were, Pauline Trevelyan was catholic enough to be in sympathy with both of us."

The early companionship of the youthful poet and the future historian ought, it may be said, to have been rich in benefit to both. But unfortunately Algernon Swinburne and George Otto Trevelyan had not a taste, not a pursuit in common. The books and the men that Swinburne loved and admired are such as have been already mentioned in these pages; Trevelyan, on the other hand, was "never tired of reading and talking about Thackeray and *Tristram Shandy*, and Albert Smith's and Theodore Hook's novels," to all of which the poet was indifferent. The same difference divided them in the classic literature which they both loved as enthusiastic undergraduates. Swinburne was entirely devoted to Aeschylus and Catullus; Trevelyan with an equal exclusiveness to Aristophanes and Juvenal. "No author existed for me," Sir George O. Trevelyan writes me, "who was not a favourite with Macaulay, and though that gave me a large field of choice, it must be allowed that Macaulay's reading did not lie along the same lines as that of Gabriel Rossetti's circle. Moreover, I was always eager to be after the blackcock and partridges, although I shot much less well than Algernon Swinburne wrote poetry. There was no liking or disliking between us; but the plain fact is that we were not to each other's purpose." The two lads, although the one spent his long vacations from Oxford at Capheaton, and the other his from Cambridge

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two miles off at Wallington, never walked or conversed together, and Trevelyan, being fifteen months junior, regarded the extraordinary lad who could write French ballades, and who seemed to know all about King Arthur's court, "with awe and some apprehension." It would be an error, however, to suppose that if Swinburne did not happen to shoot partridges, he was inert or lackadaisical. On the contrary, at this time, and for the next two or three years, Swinburne's activity and hardihood in riding and swimming and climbing were the wonder and the alarm of those who were responsible for his well-being, and it was a very anxious business to be in charge of Master Algernon. "That lad is a flame of fire," one of his grandfather's visitors exclaimed as he flashed, hatless, past the windows.

In some verses, apparently addressed to W. B. Scott, written twenty years afterwards, but hitherto only circulated privately, Swinburne describes his sensations in Northumberland at this time:

> Whenever in August holiday times
> I rode or swam through a rapture of rhymes,
> Over heather or crag, and by scaur and by stream,
> Clothed with delight by the might of a dream,
> With the sweet sharp wind blown hard through my hair,
> On eyes enkindled and head made bare; . . .
> Or loosened a song to seal for me
> A kiss on the clamorous mouth of the sea.

Ruskin had been so much struck with the young poet that when he next visited Oxford, and stayed with his and Sir Walter Trevelyan's intimate friend, Dr. (afterwards Sir) Henry Acland, Swinburne was asked to the house. But prob-

ably this was not his earliest introduction to the active and enlightened doctor, who was then reader in anatomy at Christ Church and Radcliffe Librarian, for Acland was already interested in the Pre-Raphaelites, and particularly in Morris and Burne-Jones. He was just about this time appointed regius professor of medicine, and he was full of philanthropic activities and stirring projects. He was very hospitable, and Swinburne used to describe his house as full of bores, who stood about in groups and made fatuously aesthetic remarks. Acland, who was the soul of urbanity, was never conscious of the shortcomings of his hospitality. But there was a kind of solemnity about him that made the Pre-Raphaelites, and particularly Swinburne, forget their manners. Burne-Jones wickedly said that "Acland's pulse was only really quickened when osteologists were by, who compared their bones with his till the conversation rattled."

Swinburne was particularly annoyed because Acland, in his boundless sympathy, wished to share "the orgies and dare-devilries" of their little group, and on one occasion they all fled to London for the night, to avoid having tea in a meadow with Acland and his children. They behaved very badly, and like shy and naughty little boys, to excellent Dr. Acland, whom they privately called, I do not know why, "the Rose of Brazil"; but the biographer has to admit, with a blush, that Swinburne behaved the worst of all. On one occasion, when Dr. Acland was so kind as to read aloud a paper on sewage, there was a scene over which the Muse of History must draw a veil.

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In August 1857 Swinburne went to Glasgow to visit Nichol in his home, and the two friends presently started for a trip to Skye and the central Hebrides. They climbed the peak of Blaaven with success, and "with no great danger." The weather was glorious, and Swinburne, who was in towering spirits, "desecrated and insulted" the islands with vain puns, saying, "We ran a Muck once or twice, and were like to have made a Mull of the affair, but on the whole it was a Rum go!" To the end of his life he was apt to shock the dignity of the solemn by such playfulness, which, in the midst of the general intensity of his demeanour, gave a very human relief to his conversation. Nichol returned the visit by staying with the Swinburnes in the Isle of Wight the following Christmas, and it was at this time that Swinburne called, "with a college friend of his" (doubtless Nichol), on Tennyson at Farringford, who asked him to dinner, and "thought him a very modest and intelligent young fellow." Tennyson read *Maud* to him, and appreciated the delicacy Swinburne showed in that "he did not press upon me any verses of his own." In later years, Swinburne mentioned that, on this occasion, Tennyson "expressed a special devotion for Virgil."

A certain impression was made on the young poet by his attending the lectures of Matthew Arnold, who was appointed Professor of Poetry at Oxford in 1857. But these lectures had the effect at first of disappointing the ardent lover of Victor Hugo and Landor, who found their moderation cold. This impression was heightened by the

issue of *Merope*, which, indeed, the truest admirers of Arnold have agreed to regard as a failure. Swinburne admitted afterwards that the perfection of Arnold's prose was not acceptable to him at first, but he had already cultivated a passion for his lyrical poetry. With his astounding faculty for acquiring the best at the earliest moment, Swinburne had secured a copy of *Empedocles on Etna* while he was still at Eton. "Early as this was" (1852), "it was not my first knowledge of the poet; the 'Reveller,' the 'Merman,' 'The New Sirens,' I had mainly by heart in a time of childhood just ignorant of teens," that is to say, in 1849, the year of their publication. The effect of this boyish enthusiasm was partly weakened, when Swinburne began to attend Arnold's lectures in 1857, by the prejudice of Nichol, who, full of ardour for Carlyle, deprecated the Hellenism of Arnold, and who is doubtless the "profane alien" who scandalised Swinburne by defining the author of *Empedocles* as "David the son of Goliath." Swinburne's mature regard for Matthew Arnold should be studied in the very elaborate and generous monograph he published ten years later. In this he touches the various qualities of Arnold's style in prose and verse with extraordinary fulness.[1]

At the beginning of his third year at Oxford,

[1] All the contributions to *Undergraduate Papers* were unsigned. In 1888 Swinburne confessed to four of these, which have been mentioned above, but Nichol stated in a letter to Mr. Wise (December 23 of that year) that they were five in number. The fifth, which Swinburne never acknowledged, is stated in Professor Knight's *Memoir of John Nichol* to have been "Modern Hellenism," in the course of which the writer speaks with ironic displeasure of some remarks he had just heard Matthew Arnold make, in a lecture, about Sir Walter Raleigh as a historian.

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under the stimulus of Jowett's conversation, Swinburne paid a closer attention to his studies than he had hitherto vouchsafed, and he took a second in moderations. In the course of this year, too, he won the Taylorian scholarship for French and Italian. With Italy and France, indeed, his thoughts were now occupied, even to excess. In January the fanatical Carbonaro, Orsini, attempted to assassinate Napoleon III., of whose character and person Swinburne had formed a violent hatred. The crime supplied the poet with a new hero, and having procured a portrait of Orsini, he hung it up in his sitting-room, opposite that of Mazzini, and pirouetted in front of it in ecstasies of enthusiasm. In the midst of a republican fervour which was nourished upon *Les Châtiments* of Victor Hugo—with its invectives against "le singe," "le vautour," "l'assassin"—the young English poet was summoned to accompany his parents to Paris in the Easter vacation of 1858. It was his earliest experience of France. He gave them a solemn promise that he would do nothing while in Paris to undermine the authority of Napoleon III., and this grave undertaking so much amused Lady Trevelyan that she painted a water-colour drawing of Algernon, stripped to the waist, his red hair flying out like the tail of a comet, with a blunderbuss in either hand, striding across the top of a Parisian barricade.

Swinburne once described to me an incident of this visit to Paris, too characteristic not to be preserved. He handsomely kept his word not to endanger the Empire by any overt act, but

his republican spirit boiled within him. One afternoon, driving in an open carriage in the Champs Élysées, Algernon being on the box beside the driver, the party met "the Accurséd" in his imperial person. Admiral and Lady Jane Swinburne stood up and bowed to the Emperor, who, very politely, raised his hat in response. "And did you take off your hat to him?" I asked. "Not wishing," the poet answered slowly in an ecstasy of ironic emphasis,—"Not wishing to be obliged to cut my hand off at the wrist the moment I returned to the hotel, I—did—*not*!" On his reappearance at Balliol, Swinburne's rites of incantation before the portraits of Mazzini and Orsini became more extravagant than ever. In these performances he was humorously supported by the sympathy of T. H. Green, but other fellow-undergraduates regarded them as silly and almost blasphemous. Nichol, however, was interested in them, and drew Jowett's attention to the unparalleled phenomenon of a young person at Oxford who followed with passionate excitement and close personal study the great events of the Italy of that day. Oddly enough Jowett was rather an admirer of Napoleon III.

Swinburne was drawn aside from the obsession of republicanism by his interest in the new and wonderful world of art which his Pre-Raphaelite friends opened out before him. Early in 1858 he was profoundly moved by studying the old French *Violier des Histoires Romaines*, which he immediately began to imitate. The publication of William Morris's *Defence of Guenevere* filled him with emulation and respect. "Reading it," he

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wrote, "I would fain be worthy to sit down at his feet." On the other hand, Morris, with great affability, had consented to read in manuscript, and to commend, a drama of *Rosamond*, which Swinburne had now completed. How far this play, which we know was burned and then rewritten, corresponded with the *Rosamond* afterwards published, it is impossible to say. "But I suspect I must be Eglamor, to Morris as Sordello," Swinburne modestly admitted. A quotation from a letter of this time deals with the great poem of Browning, which Nichol, who was still almost the only Browningite in Oxford, had no doubt recommended to him. Swinburne from Oxford writes to Hatch, who had now become a curate in a parish in the East End of London:

> I long to be with you by firelight between the sunset and the sea to have talk of *Sordello*; it is one of my canonical scriptures. Does he sleep and forget? I think yes. Did the first time Palma's mouth trembled to touch his in the golden rose-lands of Paradise, a sudden power of angelic action come over him? I suspect, not utterly companionless. Sometimes one knows—not now: but I suppose he slept years off before she kissed him. In Heaven she grew too tired and thin to sing well, and her face grew whiter than its aureole with pain and want of him. And if, like the other Saint, she wept, the tears fell upon his shut lids and fretted the eyes apart as they trickled. Who knows these matters? Only we keep the honey-stain of hair. I write more folly to you than I dare read over.

He was now full of schemes of his own. He composed a dramatic lyric called "The Golden House," which seems to have disappeared. He planned an epic poem on the Albigenses, but was

conscious of insufficient knowledge: "I must read more, and then dash at it in wrath." Again he had before him the subject of Tristram and Iseult, who were to be the life-long companions of his imagination: "I will send you specimens of a new poem on *Tristram* which I am about," he writes. In a half-ironic, half-defiant mood he confesses to "an abortive covetousness of imitation in which an exaggeration of the faults of my models," mainly Shelley, Browning, and Morris, "is happily neutralised by my own imbecility."

Under the pressure of Nichol, Swinburne presently passed through a period of looking to Carlyle as to an inspired teacher and guide, but Jowett, who was now seeing more and more of him, warned the young man against the influence of that writer. It is interesting to notice that for very many years the fascination and repulsion which Carlyle exercised over Swinburne continued to pulsate; he could never comfortably make up his mind whether to accept or to repudiate Carlyle, whom, however, in the main he decidedly repudiated. Jowett had now extended over Swinburne that aegis of interest and sympathy with which he overshadowed intelligent young men, not at Balliol only, but at other colleges. He is said to have been puzzled by something illogical and almost incoherent in Swinburne's *boutades*, which yet amused him very much. The story goes that Jowett set an essay on the school of Eleatic Philosophers for his weekly class of undergraduates. Swinburne was asked to read his composition aloud, while Jowett sat before the fire, breaking the coal with a small poker.

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The essay was a torrent of words, read very rapidly and shrilly. When the poet had finished, Jowett said, after a long silence, "Mr. Swinburne, I do not see that you have been pursuing any particular line of thought."

Swinburne kept terms regularly through the years 1856, 1857, and 1858, but after that a change came over his temper. The restraining influence of his older friends was removed, for Rossetti, Burne-Jones, and Morris had returned to London, Nichol had departed for Scotland at Christmas, while Hatch, Spencer Stanhope, and others had taken their degrees and left the University. Swinburne's conduct became turbulent and unseemly; he was looked upon as "dangerous" by the college authorities, and Jowett expressed a fear that he might be sent down for some extravagance, "Balliol thereby making itself as ridiculous as University had made itself about Shelley." It was now that Lord Sheffield heard Swinburne speak at the Union, "reading excitedly but ineffectively a long tirade against Napoleon, and in favour of Mazzini." This "ingenuous confession of wrong-headed boyish perversity," as it was universally regarded, "was received with a general kindly smile of amusement" by an assembly, which contained, so at least it appeared to the orator, "grave and reverend seniors" as well as undergraduates not much older than himself. Swinburne followed with frantic interest the movements of Italy and Austria, and was hardly able to sustain the emotion produced in him by the declaration of war, and by the successive battles of Magenta

and Solferino. He kept the first two terms of 1859, but he did not reside at all during the second half of the summer term, in consequence of Jowett's growing anxiety about his behaviour, which became more and more unruly.

Not much scandal seems to have been caused by Swinburne's extravagances, except within Balliol College, where they were the cause of much annoyance to the authorities. But, so far as his friends in other colleges knew, his only offences consisted in a defiant neglect of morning chapel and in a determined disobedience of regulations. Lord Bryce writes to me :

> I remember how once—I think in 1859—he had been gated by the Dean, old Mr. Woolcombe, for non-attendance, repeated after many admonitions, at chapel, and how consequently he could not accompany us on the annual excursion which the Old Mortality used to make to some place of interest or beauty within reach of Oxford. When we returned in the evening [from Edgehill], some one said, "Let us condole with poor Swinburne," and so we went to his rooms to cheer him up. He launched into a wonderful display of vituperative eloquence. He was not really angry, but he enjoyed the opportunity, and the resources of his imagination in metaphor and the amazing richness of his vocabulary had never, I think, struck us so much before.

This richness of invective was the wonder and envy of his youthful friends. William Morris used to describe scenes of Homeric splendour. Swinburne was under the impression that there were only two fares for cabmen, a shilling for a short drive and eighteenpence for a long one. On one occasion a cabman who considered himself underpaid began to abuse Morris and

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Swinburne, when the latter instantly replied with such a torrent of vituperation that the cabman drove off at full speed.

Lord Bryce's observation, "he was not really angry," throws a valuable light on many of his later escapades in controversy. He was not really angry with Furnivall and Emerson and the rest, but he enjoyed the opportunity to blaze in invective. At Oxford it is not to be doubted that his contemporaries of the Old Mortality alone, with the possible exception of Jowett, understood him. To the other dons and undergraduates he seemed half-mad and a little dangerous. His intimate friends recognised that he was an extraordinary being, referable to no category. With all his excitability and extravagance of language, and his general irresponsibility, he had admirable manners and plenty, not only of *savoir faire*, but of shrewdness in his judgments of others.

But he was all out of tune with college discipline, and after consultation with the Admiral, Jowett determined that it would be best that Algernon should leave Oxford for a season, soon after entering his twenty-third year. He found an excuse for sending him to read modern history with William Stubbs, afterwards Bishop of Oxford, but then known as a learned young clergyman who had taken a country living that he might devote himself to the study of ecclesiastical registers. His parish was the strictly agricultural one of Navestock, near Romford in Essex, where he had quite recently married the mistress of the village school. To this amiable couple the republican was duly sent as a private

pupil. Swinburne, a little in disgrace, but absolutely imperturbable, arrived at Navestock on a summer Saturday evening, and Mr. and Mrs. Stubbs, on the supposition that he must be tired, kindly suggested that he should have his sleep out, and be excused from attending morning service in the parish church. The poet's breakfast was served in his bedroom, but when the Vicar started for church Swinburne perceived that it was a glorious day, and reflected that it was a pity not to be out-of-doors. The vicarage of Navestock stands close to the churchyard, and to approach the church from the village every one must pass the gate of the vicarage garden. Swinburne, who had a preference for strong colours, slipped his feet into a pair of scarlet slippers, arrayed himself in a crimson dressing-gown, and sauntered out into the garden. The bell now summoned the parish to its devotions, and it occurred to Swinburne that it would be interesting to see what sort of people went to church in Essex on Sunday mornings.

So, with the sun lighting up his great head of hair like a burning bush, with his robe all crimson to the ankles, and his vermilion shoes on his feet, he leaned pensively over the gate. The earliest worshippers began to come along the lane, but one and all stopped at a respectful distance, nor dared to pass the flaming apparition. Swinburne grew more and more interested in the silent, swelling crowd that now began to block the lane. Meanwhile there was an ecclesiastical deadlock; not a worshipper appeared in church, until Stubbs, at a loss to account for the absence of

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his parishioners, bade the clerk to ring again. Still no parishioners! But at last the boldest man in Navestock, fixing his eyes on the poet and hugging the further hedge, made a bolt past for the churchyard, and the entire congregation followed him in a rush. Swinburne reflected "how oddly the Essex yokel takes his Sunday service," and then strolled back to the vicarage to dress for luncheon. This was his version of the incident, which Stubbs on his part was wont to tell in more or less similar terms.

Another story of the Navestock episode used to be recounted by Stubbs. Finding Swinburne to be passionately devoted to the poets and remarkably learned in their works, his host and hostess inquired whether he did not write poetry himself. It appeared that he did, and being pressed to produce a specimen of it, he dragged out of his box a large historical tragedy in blank verse. What this was does not seem to be remembered, but we may conjecture that it was the original draft of *Rosamond*. Early in the evening Swinburne began to read, and he read the play right through. Stubbs was very much impressed with the merits of the piece, but also with its faults, and he felt obliged to say that he thought the tone of the amatory passages somewhat objectionable. He had anticipated a little scene of modest confusion, which he would have removed by praise, but what he was not prepared for was a long silent stare, followed by a scream which rent the vicarage, and by the bolt upstairs of the outraged poet, hugging his MS. to his bosom. Presently gentle Mrs. Stubbs stole up-

stairs, and tapping at Swinburne's door, entreated him to come down to supper. There was no reply, but an extraordinary noise within of tearing and a strange glare through the key-hole. All night, at intervals, there were noises in the poet's room, and the Stubbses were distracted. In the morning Swinburne appeared extremely late, and deathly pale. Stubbs, by this time very wretched, hastened to say how sorry he was that he had so hastily condemned the drama, and how much he hoped that Swinburne had not been discouraged by his criticism. The poet replied, "I lighted a fire in the empty grate, and I burned every page of my manuscript." Stubbs was horrified. "But it does not matter; I sat up all night and wrote it right through again from memory."

The stay at Navestock was a very pleasant episode, and Swinburne never ceased to refer to it with pleasure. Stubbs, who was not only a very kindly but a really witty man, always spoke in a friendly way of Swinburne, and enjoyed being chaffed about his pupil. But the visit came to an end, and when, on the 14th of October, Swinburne had to reappear in Oxford, he proved to be as unfitted for university life as ever. Instead of attending to his work, he occupied himself, in his lodgings in Broad Street, with writing a three-act comedy in the manner of Fletcher, called *Laugh and Lie Down*; this, perhaps happily, is lost. His landlady, whose previous tenant had been Nichol, made complaints to the authorities about Swinburne's late hours and general irregularities, and afterwards laid it

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down as a rule that she would never take another lodger from Balliol College. "I've had me fill of them tiresome Balliol gentlemen," she severely said. Jowett gave the matter up in despair, and on the 21st of November 1859 Swinburne left Oxford for good, never taking a degree. Nothing can be added to his own frank statement, made nearly forty years later, "My Oxonian career culminated in total and scandalous failure." [1]

[1] The quarrel with Oxford was never healed, but when Lord Curzon of Kedleston was appointed Chancellor of the University, one of his earliest acts was to offer an honorary degree to the poet. I am allowed to print the reply:

May 3, 1907.

DEAR LORD CURZON—I am much honoured and gratified by the far too complimentary terms in which you offer me a distinction which I must decline to accept. But I am not the less sensible of your courtesy, or the less hopeful that you will not regard me as ungrateful for it.—I am, yours very truly,

A. C. SWINBURNE.

CHAPTER III

EARLY LIFE IN LONDON

(1859–1865)

WHEN he left Oxford,[1] Algernon went up to Northumberland, where his grandfather had now entered the ninety-eighth year of his life. From Capheaton he made negotiations with his father, who, deeply incensed by his son's failure at the University, continued to inquire what Algernon meant to do. The young man declined to live any longer at home, but preferred his liberty in London, with the power to devote himself to literature. Lady Jane was on his side, and Admiral Swinburne ultimately withdrew his opposition. After a long delay, in the course of 1860, an allowance, small at first, but ultimately

[1] Swinburne's name continued to head the list of undergraduates at Balliol for nearly twenty years after he left Oxford. My friend, the late Master of the College, who kindly verified the fact for me, told me that in February 1878 the poet removed his name. Up to this date he had regularly renewed his Caution money every year, and he did this as a protest against the action of the authorities. If he had not done so, his name would have disappeared from the Calendar, but if the dues are paid up, the University cannot prevent the name from appearing. As the Master informed me, "The College pays the dues annually out of the Caution until this comes to an end, and after the 'cupboard is bare' the name disappears mechanically." Swinburne's persistence in forcing his name on to the Calendar is an interesting proof of his annoyance.

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(I believe) of £400 a year from his parents having been offered and accepted, Algernon arrived in London, where his only acquaintances seem to have been the painters whom he had met at the Oxford Union three years before. Of these the one he found first was Edward Burne-Jones, but presently William Morris came back from France, the Madox Browns were settled in Fortess Terrace, and Rossetti, fresh from Paris, returned to Chatham Place. These last three men had lately married, and their modest households were open to the young poet. In June 1860 Burne-Jones also married, and from the very first Algernon was made at home in his house. The charming recollections of Lady Burne-Jones form almost the only London record of Swinburne's life at this time. After the summer of this year, he was a frequent and always a welcome visitor to the William Morrises at the Red House, in Essex, where Miss May Morris tells me that she just remembers him, lying on the grass in the orchard, with his red hair spread abroad, while her baby sister and she scattered rose-leaves over his laughing face.

He took rooms at 16 Grafton Street, Fitzroy Square, to be near the British Museum. The Burne-Joneses lived close by, in Russell Place. Swinburne would come in two or three times in a day, "bringing his poems hot from his heart," as Lady Burne-Jones puts it. He was restless beyond words, hopping about the room unceasingly, "seeming to keep time, by a swift movement of the hands at the wrists, and sometimes of the feet also, with some inner rhythm

of excitement." At that date, being twenty-three years of age, but looking much younger, he was a miracle of strange freshness and fascination. "When repeating poetry he had a perfectly natural way of lifting his indescribably fine eyes in a rapt unconscious gaze, and their clear green colour softened by thick brown eyelashes was unforgettable." Already the profusion and magnificence of his talk were the wonder of those who listened to him. He saw, however, but very few people, studying and writing, generally alone, with feverish assiduity.

In the course of 1860 his parents took him abroad with his brother and sisters, to Mentone, where Admiral Swinburne had rented a villa, the Maison Laurenti, for the winter. Algernon so violently detested this place that it became a joke in the family circle. Early in 1861 he left his relations at Mentone, and made a short tour, his first experience of Italy. He passed through Genoa, Turin, and Milan, and reached Venice. He wrote home his impressions in a paraphrase of Alfred de Musset, beginning:

> In red Venice here
> Not one horse a-stir,
> Not one fisher afloat,
> Not one boat.

Swinburne's whimsical dislike of "the weary Mediterranean, drear to see," "one dead flat sapphire, void of wrath," was often reiterated, but he had no great knowledge of its moods. In one of his letters he speaks of "The Riviera, *que diable!* it's the dullest bit of earth in Europe I

should think, but you can't die there if you try, and the climate is divine for invalids, though *I*, who am never unwell but by my own doing for a day or two, can't breathe it, it's so ultra-stimulating and soothing at once to the nerves."

On his return to London he resumed relations with the old artistic friends who have already been mentioned. Amongst these Rossetti was the most prominent, and he took, almost immediately, the position which Nichol had held at Oxford, as the somewhat elder guardian-friend whose strong will guided and supported the child-like nature of Swinburne. In his *Record of Friendship*, written (but not published) at the time of Rossetti's death, we are told by the younger poet that it was at the end of the year 1860 that the acquaintance which began at Oxford ripened into an affectionate intimacy, "shaped and coloured, on his side, by the cordial kindness and exuberant generosity which to the last, I am told, distinguished [Rossetti's] recognition of younger men's efforts or attempts: on mine, I can confidently say, by gratitude as loyal and admiration as fervent as ever strove and ever failed to express all the sweet and sudden passion of youth towards greatness in its elder."

Rossetti adopted, with a full and almost boisterous appreciation of the qualities of Swinburne, and a tender indulgence to his frailties, a tone of authority in dealing with "my little Northumbrian friend," as he used to call him, which was eminently wholesome. The attitude was that of a strong elder brother to a delicate younger one, and it combined, with great for-

bearance and a generous and even vociferous facility in praising, a certain firmness, almost a discipline. There can be no question for the biographer who examines the whole life of Swinburne, that D. G. Rossetti exercised over him a more restraining and yet stimulating influence than any one else; nor, on the other hand, can it be overlooked that Swinburne, whose general culture, literary enthusiasm, and knowledge of poetry far exceeded Rossetti's, was of immense service to his friend in the guidance of his imagination. As an example of what Swinburne could do in this direction, I may print here, for the first time, a note which I find in Mr. Wise's collection of his MSS. It is dated 1886:

> *Entre nous* (*bien entendu*) it was I—my love of the uncompleted poem must excuse the egotism of the revelation—who suggested as the final solution or catastrophe of "The Bride's Prelude," that the brothers should kill Urscelyn the moment he has made an honest woman of poor Aloyse, and so leave her to live in peace and honour with her restored child. D. G. R. told me that what had hindered him from continuing the poem was that he could not think of a satisfactory close to the story (in my constant opinion, his finest and most pathetic invention), and when I, modestly, and with very real and sincere diffidence, suggested this, he jumped at it (so to speak) in a manner most flattering to my young self-esteem (all this, of course, was in the old days of Chatham Place) and said he would finish on those lines.

This must have been in 1861. Sometimes the master would not be so docile under the hand of the pupil. Swinburne gently mourned, not more

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harshly than a turtle-dove might do, over the obstinacy of his adored Gabriel in sticking to

> . . . a French couplet showing his ignorance of the rules of French verse—*veut* and *cheveux* being no more admissible as rhymes than *God* and *rot*. (Read—if anything—
>
> rien ne veux
> Qu'une rose à mes cheveux.)

But here D. G. R., alas, thought that he knew best. Such diversions made the great painting-room at No. 14 Chatham Place, Blackfriars Bridge, with its magnificent view over the river, a very paradise to Swinburne in these earliest London days.

These were also the days of the reform of artistic ornament and furniture under the auspices of William Morris and his companions. Swinburne, as we have seen, was a frequent and a favourite guest at the Red House, and Mrs. Morris, for whom he had an admiration approaching to worship, never ceased to speak of him with high appreciation. He liked to be present when the artists were at work, and Morris described to Mr. Cockerell how Swinburne would read his poems aloud, covering up one eye with his hand as he did so. This curious trick I also recollect, without exactly understanding the object of it; Swinburne often seemed to have a difficulty in focussing his sight, which I have no doubt was astigmatic. His remarkable head was often recognisable in the works of the Pre-Raphaelites, and Philip Webb used to report that when the early Morris glass was exposed at Scarborough,

George Campfield, one of the best workmen of the firm, shouted out, "Blest if they haven't put in little Carroty-locks." This was a reference to Swinburne, whose portrait he detected.

Late in the summer Algernon went back to Northumberland, where his grandfather's long life was gradually closing. Half-way through his ninety-ninth year Sir John Swinburne died at Capheaton on the 26th of September 1860. After the funeral, his grandson moved over to stay with the Trevelyans at Wallington, where Lady Trevelyan received him with that indulgent sympathy which so much endeared her to her friends. Sir George O. Trevelyan tells me that he heard him, more than once, reciting his poems to the ladies in the Italian saloon at Wallington. "He sat in the middle of the room, with one foot curled up on the seat of his chair beneath him, declaiming verse with a very different intonation and emphasis from that with which our set of young Cantabs read Byron and Keats to each other in our own college rooms at Trinity."

Unfortunately, these symposia were often more completely to the taste of the hostess than of the host. One day Sir Walter Trevelyan came into the drawing-room and found a French novel lying on the table. He asked how it got there, and was told that Algernon had brought it as a gift. It was nothing worse, I believe, than a volume of the *Comédie Humaine*, but he was a rash man who in those days recommended a French book to an English lady. Even if she made no objection, her male relations were sure to take umbrage. Sir Walter Trevelyan threw

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the book on the fire with a very rough remark, and Swinburne marched with great dignity out of the house. The alienation was not permanent, and Swinburne was soon on the old affectionate terms, not merely with Lady Trevelyan, but with Sir Walter. He proceeded to the W. B. Scotts in Newcastle, where Scott completed in October an absurdly-drawn portrait, which he had begun in the previous January. Odd as is this work of art, it is an invaluable record of Algernon's expression and colour at that time.[1]

The extreme violence of the denunciation of W. B. Scott which Swinburne unfortunately allowed himself to publish on the appearance of Scott's *Autobiographical Notes* in 1892 has led to a discrediting of the witness of that old friend's recollections. But it must in fairness be recorded that there had been no cessation of friendly relations when Scott died, at an advanced age, in 1890, and that Swinburne greeted his departure in memorial verses which celebrated the dead man as "poet and painter and friend, thrice dear." In these lines he did not exaggerate the merit of Scott's art, which was not great, but he did warmest justice to his faith and fervour, and to the nobility of his aim. Unfortunately, the indiscretion of an editor presently revealed that Scott, who had no sense of humour, had recorded, with a certain bluntness, his jealousy of younger and more famous friends. Swinburne, whose pen was ever too near his fingers, dashed into tem-

[1] It became the property of Mr. R. W. Raper, of Trinity College, Oxford, who kindly gave me a reproduction of it. A week before his lamented death (July 18, 1915) Mr. Raper dictated for me his recollections of Swinburne.

pestuous reprisals, but these (we ought to note) he never reprinted, while retaining in publication his praise of his clumsy but faithful old acquaintance. This incident will be dealt with later, but it is necessary to say here, that in spite of what Swinburne afterwards wrote in his haste, W. B. Scott was an encouraging influence in the poet's early life, while his records of the years with which we are now dealing, although loose, are true in their general bearing.

One of the earliest occupations of Algernon's leisure after his arrival in town was his study of the writings of Charles J. Wells, a living but forgotten poet of sixty years of age, contemporary with Keats and Hazlitt, who had long abandoned the practice of literature and had accepted his own failure with resignation. D. G. Rossetti, probably in 1847, had met with the two books of Wells, his prose *Stories after Nature* (1822) and his huge drama in blank verse, *Joseph and his Brethren* (1824). These he had read with surprise, and the latter with "insane exultation." In 1849 Rossetti had planned a journey to Quimper, where Wells lived, for the purpose of persuading him to republish *Joseph* in a second edition. Rossetti now, in 1860, passed Wells over to Swinburne, who accepted him with rapture. *Joseph and his Brethren* was already so rare that Swinburne was obliged to work on it at the British Museum, where he copied out half the poem. He recommended it ardently to Monckton Milnes (Oct. 15, 1860), adding, "I should be very glad if I had anything to do with helping it to a little of the credit it must gain in the end." At

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this time he had finished an article analysing *Joseph and his Brethren*, in the course of which Rossetti had helped him with the choice of extracts. It is not possible to discover in what degree this lost article of 1860 coincided with the introduction Swinburne published with the edition which he persuaded his own publishers to issue in 1876. But it will be noted that certain passages in the latter are spoken of as the opinion of "a reader of the age at which this book was written," and are given in inverted commas. Swinburne being in 1860 of the same age as Wells was when he wrote *Joseph*, I think we may take for granted that these passages at least are part of the original essay. Swinburne's almost fanatical admiration for Wells' poetry, which survived the disconcerting indifference to it of the old dramatist himself, gradually became moderate, but it never entirely ceased. *Joseph and his Brethren* undoubtedly had an effect on his own dramatic manner.

Shortly after Swinburne's arrival in London he had formed one new acquaintance, who has just been named, and who was destined to fill a large place in his life. This was Richard Monckton Milnes, then fifty years of age, and a foremost figure in the literary and political society of the day. As Milnes was not at that time acquainted either with the Swinburne family or with the poet-painters, it is thought likely that Lady Trevelyan had commended her young friend to a possible patron. On the 5th of May 1860, in reply to a formal summons, Swinburne called at Milnes' town house, 16 Upper Brook Street.

The two were soon on terms of high facetious familiarity, and during the next few years, in particular, Milnes was infinitely serviceable to the young friend who so much amused and stimulated him. One of the first things Swinburne did was to introduce Milnes to the names and work of Rossetti, Morris, and Meredith. A letter (October 15th, 1860), gives an early touch or two:

> I have done some more work to *Chastelard*, and rubbed up one or two other things: my friend George Meredith has asked me to send some to "Once a Week," which valuable publication he props up occasionally with fragments of his own. Rossetti has just done a drawing of a female model and myself embracing—I need not say in the most fervent and abandoned style—meant for a frontispiece to his Italian translations. Everybody, who knows me already, salutes the likeness with a yell of recognition. When the book comes out, I shall have no refuge but the grave.

The *Early Italian Poets*, however, came out with no design of the kind described, although the drawing was not lost. But before Rossetti's volume appeared, Swinburne himself had published his first book. This was *The Queen Mother and Rosamond*, containing two dramas, and published before Christmas 1860; the poet being now again in Northumberland. Swinburne's odd luck with publishers affronted him at this outset of his career, for his volume had scarcely issued with the imprint of Basil Montagu Pickering, than it was mysteriously withdrawn to reappear with that of Edward Moxon. No particulars appear to be forthcoming, but in both hands the insuccess of the venture was conspicuous. Long

afterwards Swinburne told me that "of all still-born books, *The Queen Mother* was the stillest," for that, when he had given away a few copies, and a few more had been dispersed to the press, its circulation ceased. Not one single copy was sold until long afterwards. Nobody read it, nobody saw it, nobody heard of it.

It was strange that no critic of 1860 had the intelligence to perceive what an interesting thing *The Queen Mother* was. Partly, no doubt, the dulness of the first act discouraged perusal. But more was perhaps due to the fact that the models on which the apparatus of the drama was founded were quite unfamiliar to readers of that day. Briefly, those models were Chapman in his French tragedies, and, to a much less extent, Wells in *Joseph and his Brethren*. Swinburne approaches the style of Chapman exactly as the dramatists of the romantic revival, such as Byron, Coleridge, and Barry Cornwall, had approached that of Shakespeare, but with more success. He was seized with a strong desire to reform the idea of poetical drama, based on the Elizabethans, which had been illustrated by Beddoes, P. J. Bailey, and particularly by Dobell in his *Balder* (1853), a poem that had violently attracted and then repelled Swinburne in his boyhood. He saw that these so-called dramas were really incoherent masses of dexterous or impressive verse in its essence lyrical. He wished to reconstitute a subtle and sententious kind of dramatic writing, overlaid with ingenious touches, which should revive the pleasure experienced in reading plays like *Chabot* and *Bussy d'Ambois*.

THE EARLY ITALIAN POETS
from Ciullo d'Alcamo to Dante Alighieri
translated by D. Gabriel Rossetti.
London. Smith, Elder & Co. 1861

Portrait of Swinburne in a Design by D. Gabriel Rossetti for a Frontispiece to *The Early Italian Poets*. Engraved by J. D. Cooper.

We may even conjecture that a certain fine tirade in *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois* actually started *The Queen Mother*, which also is a rapid tragical presentment of the Eve of St. Bartholomew. It is almost a good play, being altogether a delicate and artificial poem. The blank verse in which it is composed is already wonderful,—sinuous, varied, and sweet, of a perfect originality, with no trace of the prevailing manner of Tennyson. There is too much elaboration in the language, even in its marvellously accomplished monosyllabic effects, too much of the affected Jacobean humour in its movement. The plot is turbid at first, and never becomes quite easy to follow, although with the third act there is a great increase of clarity, and the fifth act, unlike most fifth acts, is the best in the play. There are very fine passages, such as the scene where the Queen Mother, the King, and Guise visit Admiral Coligny in his bed, and the dialogue between Charles and Dénise in the third act. The tirades of Catherine, without being turgid, are often in the grand style. Readers familiar with the later dramas of Swinburne may be startled by foreshadowings of the great scenes in *Bothwell*. On the whole, *The Queen Mother*, although nobody recognised it at the time, is as promising a first work as ever a young scholar-poet published.

Rosamond, a one-act play, is of a very different character. This is a study in sheer Pre-Raphaelitism, in which dim, melancholy figures, a little uncertain in their anatomy, are exhibited against a brilliant and minute background of

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pure colour. It is like a water-colour drawing by Rossetti translated into verse — beautiful wandering verse of this kind :

> Maids will keep round me, girls with smooth worn hair
> When mine is hard, no silk in it to feel,
> Tall girls to dress me, laughing underbreath,
> Too low for gold to tighten at the waist.
> Eh, the hinge sharpens at the grate across ?
> Five minutes now to get the green walk through
> And turn—the chestnut leaves will take his hair
> If he turn quick ; or I shall hear some bud
> Fall, or some pebble's chink along the fence,
> Or stone his heel grinds, or torn lime-blossom
> Flung at me from behind ; not poppies now,
> Nor marigolds, but rose and lime-flowèr.

There is much of the Oxford spirit about *Rosamond*, which is an undergraduate effort much revised. Indeed, we have already seen that this is probably the drama which Swinburne read to Stubbs, and tore up in a passion, and rewrote from memory, when he was staying at Navestock.

In spite, or perhaps because of his intense preoccupation with dramatic poetry, Swinburne was never much of a play-goer. He declared in after years that he had registered a solemn oath in Heaven that he would never again go to a Shakespearian representation on the stage after seeing Fechter in the part of Othello. This must have been in October 1861. He thought the actor handsome, and admired his gestures, but held his treatment of the smothering scene to be abominable. When he came to the part—

> It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul—
> Yet she must die or she'll betray more men,

"perhaps the most perfect bit in Shakespeare," Fechter took up a mirror and looked into it, saying, as his own face was reflected—

It is the cause, it is the cause!

At this, Swinburne told Dr. Bird and his sister many years afterwards:

I wanted to leap out of the box I was in and break his neck, and then to rush out of the theatre, flying as if lightning were at my heels. When I was a child, before I could understand things, I read *Othello*, and though I did not know what was the guilt of Desdemona, could not guess at the adultery, yet I distinctly knew that whatever "the cause" might be it applied to something *she* had done.

So far as I know he kept the vow implicitly, to such a degree that when about 1876 he wrote the song, "Love laid his sleepless head," for a performance of (I think) *A Winter's Tale*, and had accepted, under great pressure, an invitation for the first night, at the last moment he insisted on my taking his place. He always asserted that no living actors were adequate to the representation of Victor Hugo's tragedies, and deprecated the presentation of those plays.

Swinburne was now occupied with a scheme which had begun to take shape at Oxford and which was not finally abandoned till much later. This was the composition of a cycle of nineteen or twenty prose stories, to be issued as the *Triameron*, in rivalry with Boccaccio and Marguerite de Navarre. He had been much impressed by the *Nouvelles françoises en prose du XIII^e siècle*, which Morris and he had read in

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college, but a stronger influence now was that of the Italian Novellino. The only one of these tales which Swinburne printed was *Dead Love*, which he sent to "Once a Week" in 1862 and published in book form in 1864. But several others were written and three still exist in MS. Moreover, about the year 1861 he wrote a *Chronicle of Queen Fredegond*, which remains unpublished; though much longer, this also is probably intended for the *Triameron*; it is in part paraphrased from the *Historia Francorum* of Gregory of Tours. The library of his uncle, the Earl of Ashburnham, contained a copy of the 1561 edition of this rare book, and there, it is probable, Swinburne gained his remarkable intimacy with the Frankish kings of France. He once told me that the mediaeval and early French sections of his uncle's famous collection had been a source of unfailing enjoyment to him.

There can be little doubt that this was one of the happiest times in Algernon's life. His health had not begun to fail him in the least degree. He had no anxiety for the future, nothing to exasperate him in the present. Very small part of his year was spent consecutively in London, from which he was for ever breaking away to the related families in the Isle of Wight, to the Trevelyans and the Scotts in Northumberland, or to Lord Ashburnham at Battle. At each of these places he could ride or climb or swim to his heart's content, throwing off all the dust of books in the brilliant exultation of movement. That ecstasy of physical well-being, that April of the blood, could but decline and fade. Some

twenty years afterwards Swinburne described his dazzling adolescence in temperate numbers :

> The morning song beneath the stars that fled
> With twilight through the moonless mountain air,
> While Youth with burning lips and wreathless hair
> Sang towards the sun that was to crown his head,
> Rising ; the hopes that triumphed and fell dead ;
> The sweet swift eyes and songs of hours that were ;—
> These may'st thou not give back for ever ; these
> As at the sea's heart all her wrecks lie waste,
> Lie deeper than the sea ;
> But flowers thou may'st, and winds, and hours of ease,
> And all its April to the world thou may'st
> Give back, and half my April back to me.

With 1862, and the approach of his twenty-sixth year, he began to envisage life more seriously. An insatiable reader, he had by this time acquainted himself with the principal masterpieces of literature, and with hundreds of neglected works from many of which he extracted an intenser pleasure than they had ever given to a reader before. Now for five years he had been self-apprenticed to the great masters of writing, and although the total failure of his own solitary publication seems to have left him philosophically indifferent, he was becoming more and more ambitious to excel. His verses at this time were corrected, torn up, rewritten from memory with divers modifications, revised again and put away. Nothing could be less like the confident smoothness of composition which he gained later on than the labour with which he filed his early works. [No one will ever know how many times, between 1858 and 1865, *Chastelard* was destroyed and recast, polished and thrust aside in despair.]

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It was at this time that Swinburne entered upon the solitary romance of his life, and suffered a crushing disappointment. He was presented to great friends of Ruskin and of Burne-Jones, the pathologist Dr. (afterwards Sir) John Simon and his wife Jane, whom Ruskin called "his dear P.R.S.," or Pre-Raphaelite sister. They extended a very charming hospitality to a small but distinguished circle, and Swinburne became intimate with the family. Here he met with a young kinswoman of the host and hostess, a graceful and vivacious girl who made a violent impression on the young poet's heart, and who seemed, or so he thought, to encourage his advances. She gave him roses, she played and sang to him, and he conceived from her gracious ways an encouragement which she was far from seriously intending. He declared his passion, suddenly, and no doubt in a manner which seemed to her preposterous and violent. More from nervousness, probably, than from ill-will, she broke out laughing in his face. He was deeply chagrined, and, in a way which those who knew him will easily imagine for themselves, he showed his displeasure, and they parted on the worst of terms.

In a very wretched frame of mind, Swinburne went up to Northumberland, and there wrote "The Triumph of Time," which is the most profound and the most touching of all his personal poems. Speaking to me of this incident, in 1876, he assured me that the stanzas of this wonderful lyric represented with the exactest fidelity the emotions which passed through his mind when

his anger had died down, and when nothing remained but the infinite pity and the pain. The appeal to the sea in "The Triumph of Time," as to "the great sweet Mother and lover of men," was extremely natural on the lips of one who loved the sea as it was never loved before even by an Englishman:

I shall sleep, and move with the moving ships,
Change as the winds change, veer in the tide;
My lips will feast on the foam of thy lips,
I shall rise with thy rising, with thee subside;
Sleep, and not know if she be, if she were,
Filled full with life to the eyes and hair,
As a rose is fulfilled to the roseleaf tips
With splendid summer and perfume and pride.

The whole poem deserves close study as a revelation of the poet's innermost feelings, which he exposes with an equal frankness in no other section of his work.

I shall go my ways, tread out my measure,
Fill the days of my daily breath
With fugitive things not good to treasure,
Do as the world doth, say as it saith;
But if we had loved each other—O sweet,
Had you felt, lying under the palms of your feet,
The heart of my heart, beating harder for pleasure
To feel you tread it to dust and death—

Ah, had I not taken my life up and given
All that life gives and the years let go,
The wine and the honey, the balm and leaven,
The dreams reared high and the hopes brought low?
Come life, come death, not a word be said;
Should I lose you living, and vex you dead?
I shall never tell you on earth; and in heaven,
If I cry to you then, will you hear or know?

This episode was the only one of its kind in Swinburne's experience, and it was with a certain fidelity that he carried down to the grave his memory of the one girl whom he ever asked to share " the wine and leaven of lovely life " with him.

The painful realities of life were once more brought home to the enthusiastic young visionary by an event which has often been described. On the 23rd of May 1860, D. G. Rossetti had married Lizzie Siddal, between whom and Algernon Swinburne a boy-and-girl friendship immediately sprang up. They were alike in personal appearance, with the same abundant red-gold hair; they were equally inexperienced, restless, and wayward, with the same playfulness, the same absurdities. Rossetti was much entertained by their innocent intimacy, occasionally having to call them both to order, as he might a pair of charming angora cats romping too boisterously together. When the Rossettis settled in 14 Chatham Place, Swinburne was an almost incessant visitor, and the three commonly went out of an evening to eat at a restaurant. On the 10th of February 1862 they dined at the Sablonière Hotel in Leicester Square, and Rossetti saw his wife home, and went out again. When he returned, she was dead, or dying, having taken an overdose of laudanum. At the inquest Swinburne was a chief witness, but no newspaper reported his evidence, which dwelt upon the devoted affection existing between husband and wife. The following account, however, is part of a statement, still unpublished, which was

found among Swinburne's papers after his death :

I had come to know and to regard with little less than a brother's affection the noble lady whom he had recently married. On the evening of her terrible death we had all dined together at a "restaurant" which Rossetti had been accustomed to frequent. Next morning, on coming by appointment to sit for my portrait, I heard that she had died in the night, under circumstances which afterwards made necessary my appearance and evidence at the inquest held on her remains. The anguish of her widower, when next we met, under the roof of the mother with whom he had sought refuge, I cannot remember, at more than twenty years' distance, without some recrudescence of emotion. With sobs and broken speech . . . he appealed to my friendship, in the name of her regard for me—such regard he assured me, as she had felt for no other of his friends—to cleave to him in this time of sorrow, to come and keep house with him as soon as a residence could be found.

Swinburne is said to have been present when Rossetti thrust the sole manuscript of his poems into his wife's coffin, and it was to his marvellous memory that Morris, Meredith, and Burne-Jones principally trusted for the reconstruction of those lost lyrics.[1] In the presence of his "little Northumbrian friend" Rossetti found comfort and distraction, and the comrades became more inseparable than ever. During some months of

[1] One of these copies, that of "The Song of the Bower," has passed through my hands. It presents some interesting variants from the accepted text, but whether these are due to failure of Swinburne's memory or to alterations afterwards introduced by D. G. Rossetti himself, it would be rash to say. As is well known, the original MSS. were extracted from Lizzie Rossetti's coffin long afterwards, in 1869, by an order from the Home Office.

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1862, while the scheme of a general household for the painter-poets was being developed, Swinburne moved into lodgings in the house of a music teacher, 77 Newman Street, Oxford Street, and here he was active and happy for some months, until Rossetti was ready to receive him at 16 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, a Queen Anne mansion commonly called Tudor House, of which he had become the tenant. Definite rooms were set apart for Swinburne, and for William Michael Rossetti and Meredith, who were sub-tenants. Swinburne, who paid more than the others, had a sitting-room of his own on the ground floor. What made Tudor House particularly delightful was the large garden at the back. It may not be generally known that Tudor House was part of the mansion occupied by Queen Katherine Parr after the death of Henry VIII., and that it was here that the Lord High Admiral Seymour visited and paid his court to her. This was Swinburne's London home for nearly two years.

The poet had hitherto been entirely an amateur in literature, that is to say, he had never sold a manuscript or written an article at the discretion of an editor.[1] This is worth observing, as an oddity in the career of one of the most professional of all great men of letters. He was beginning to fret under his inability to address a wider public than the circle of congenial Pre-Raphaelite friends. An interesting evidence of this has lately come to hand in a letter (dated from 14 Chatham Place, Blackfriars, January 4, 1862) written by

[1] The few lines on Congreve published in 1857, while he was still an undergraduate at Oxford, can hardly be considered.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Mr. (afterwards Sir) Theodore Martin. In this letter Rossetti says:

Now here comes a petition. A young friend of mine —23 [sic] years of age—Algernon Swinburne, son of Admiral Swinburne—is a poet not promising in the common sense only, but certainly destined to be one of the two or three leaders who are to succeed Tennyson and the Brownings, and not one of whom has certainly yet cropped up among Tannhäusers and such like. At present he has his way to make, and plenty of unpublished poems and tales—all truly admirable—*à placer*;—remuneration as well as fame being of importance to him. Our friend Whitley Stokes joins with me in the highest hope of his genius. Now were I to send you some of his MSS., and you thought as we do of them, would it be possible to you, without tasking your kindness with too much trouble, to give him an introduction to Frazer or some other vehicle of publicity? Could you let me know?

There is no evidence that Martin saw his way to taking any action in the matter.[1] But, at last, in Swinburne's twenty-sixth year, the door of publicity opened before him, or at least gaped at him for a little while. Apparently through Monckton Milnes, Swinburne formed the acquaintance of Richard Holt Hutton, who had lately become part-editor and part-proprietor of the *Spectator*, a newspaper which now began to take the foremost place in England as an organ of intellectual activity. Hutton, like everybody else, was dazzled by the young poet's knowledge, and by the firmness of his taste; he invited him to write, in prose and verse, for his paper. Accordingly,

[1] I am obliged to my friend Lady Charnwood for the communication of Rossetti's letter.

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seven lyrics appeared with Swinburne's signature between April and September 1862, and among these were "Faustine," "A Song in time of Revolution," and "The Sundew," highly characteristic specimens of his early maturity. It is less easy to speak of the prose contributions, because they were anonymous. Were it not for passages in private letters, it would be dangerous to assert, what, however, those familiar with Swinburne's early style could hardly question, that the series of five long articles on *Les Misérables* of Victor Hugo, and that on *Les Fleurs du Mal* of Baudelaire are his. There are several others which I am privately certain are also Swinburne's, but I deprecate mere conjecture, and will not name them.[1]

The considerable monograph devoted to *Les Misérables* is the earliest example of Swinburne's mature prose which we possess. The knowledge of its existence was not recovered until 1914, when a reference in one of the poet's early letters set me on the track of it. He was careful to make not the slightest reference to it in later years, doubtless because the tone of it seemed cool and even carping to him when once he had resigned himself to the attitude of regarding Victor Hugo as a deity, immune from censure. But few readers will be found to deny that this utterance of his youth is more sane as criticism than much of what he afterwards published in reiterated reverberations of mere praise. The absence of

[1] A request for information on this point made to the present editor of the *Spectator* has been met by a very courteous expression of regret that none of the documents illustrating the history of the paper in 1862 have been preserved.

character in the first of these *Spectator* articles will be noted. The young reviewer moves stiffly, and it is not until his pen has warmed to the use of prose that it learns to express its master's will. But the later pages of this study are among the best which Swinburne ever wrote, inspired with enthusiasm, and not yet spoiled by bombastic fulness and riot of antithesis.

These articles, as they appeared, he sent to Victor Hugo, who acknowledged them with much graciousness, with so much, indeed, that the critic was shocked at his own excess of boldness. Algernon wrote to Milnes, with whom he often corresponded in French: "Si j'eusse su qu'il (V. H.) devait les lire, j'aurais craint de lui avoir déplu en m'attaquant aux philosophes; j'ai aussi un peu nargué en passant la vertu publique, et la démocratie vertueuse." The majestic bonhomie of "le maître qu'on a toujours vénéré" completed the subjugation of Swinburne, and never again had he the audacity to treat Victor Hugo as an ordinary mortal.

The unsigned study of Baudelaire which occupied so inordinate a space in the *Spectator* for September 1862 is a critical work of still higher importance. It marks Swinburne's earliest excursion into the analysis of modern French poetry. It required high intellectual courage to champion in an English periodical the merits of any new volume of French verse, not to speak of such a volume as *Les Fleurs du Mal*. England had not yet emerged from its long attack of Podsnappery, and there was hardly a critic of authority who ventured to advance

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the claims of French poetry. Victor Hugo's fame was that of a dramatist and a novelist, Lamartine's that of a politician; to the average cultivated Englishman Vigny was absolutely unknown, and the British notion of French lyric was bounded by the fame of Béranger and Musset, whose sentimentality Swinburne hated.

It is not certain by what means he met with the poems of Baudelaire, which had been issued in June 1857, and withdrawn from circulation, after a violent controversy and a prosecution, in August of the same year. The original edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal* had at once become an exceedingly rare book, and I think that Swinburne had not seen a copy of it. If he had, he could scarcely have avoided mentioning some of the suppressed pieces, *Les Épaves*, in particular "Les Femmes Damnées." A small second edition, with *Les Épaves* omitted, was issued in Paris in 1861, and I feel no doubt that this is the form in which Swinburne first read Baudelaire, as it is certainly that in which he reviewed him for startled subscribers to the *Spectator*. He did not know the edition of 1857 until 1864, when W. M. Rossetti procured a copy, which he gave him.[1]

The facts regarding the relations of these two great poets, who were in some aspects of their genius closely allied to one another, have hitherto been extremely obscure. The discovery of some papers in a desk, in 1912, enables me to record

[1] This copy was sold for £11 : 10s. in June 1916, when it formed lot 44 in the Catalogue of Swinburne's Library. The *Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris* of 1861 sold for £15 in the same sale, lot 40. Those seem to have been the only works by Baudelaire which Swinburne possessed at the time of his death.

what little there is to tell. Swinburne, when his article appeared in the *Spectator*, sent it, with a letter, to Baudelaire. Of this letter and missive Baudelaire, for a whole year, from indolence or failing health, made no acknowledgment whatever. Swinburne expressed surprise to Whistler, who rallied the French poet on his discourtesy. Baudelaire expressed, in reply, "tout mon repentir de mon oubli et de mon apparente ingratitude," but still could not shake off his apathy far enough to write to his English admirer. At last, on the 10th of October 1863, he managed to write a long and most interesting letter to Swinburne, which he entrusted to a French friend who was visiting London; this the friend neglected to deliver, and it was lately found, unopened, in a drawer in Paris. It is a great pity that this communication from the noble poet for whom he entertained, and continued to entertain, so exalted an esteem, never reached him, since the words which Baudelaire uses in it were calculated to give Swinburne acute pleasure. The author of *Les Fleurs du Mal* told his unknown English reviewer, "Je n'aurais jamais cru qu'un littérateur anglais pût si bien pénétrer la beauté française, les intentions françaises et la prosodie française."

To close this episode a little prematurely, Baudelaire presently forwarded to Swinburne his brochure on Wagner and Tannhäuser in Paris, and this appears to have been the only communication Swinburne ever received from him. In April 1867 Fantin-Latour mentioned the rumour that Baudelaire was dead, and Swinburne

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immediately composed his grandiose elegy, "Ave atque Vale," to which we shall return in due course. Baudelaire, however, survived until August 31st of that year, never having seen *Poems and Ballads*, in which there was so much that would have appealed to his peculiar artistic temperament.

The anonymous essays contributed to the *Spectator* of 1862 present us with a valuable opportunity of judging Swinburne's early prose style. We find it strong and pure, moving already with a certain formal magnificence; it is related to the prose of Landor, which is its obvious model, as closely as Landor's is to the movement of Cicero. The moderation of the stateliness is agreeable; there is as yet no trace, or hardly a trace, of the faults which were to invade the prose of Swinburne, the bluster and the strut, the wild exaggeration of irony, the abuse of alliteration and antithesis. These characteristics are found, however, beginning to protrude themselves in the letter on Meredith's *Poems*, where we read that "all Muses are to bow down before her who babbles, with lips yet warm from their pristine pap, after the dangling delights of a child's coral, and jingles with flaccid fingers one knows not whether a jester's or a baby's bells." This is the structure and the colour which we learn to dread, for with Swinburne as a prose-writer *suspecta sunt semper ornamenta*. For the time being, however, and under the editorial repression, it would have been difficult to find in England at that moment a critic more learned, more dignified, or more graceful than the un-

named and unknown reviewer of Victor Hugo and Baudelaire.

The defence of George Meredith has been mentioned. That writer, already valued within a very narrow circle as the author of *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* and *Evan Harrington*, had been drawn, by a vivid sympathy rather than by complete conviction, to join the Pre-Raphaelites in the course of 1861, and had impressed Swinburne with his power of character and depth of imagination. But Meredith was not the elder by nine years for nothing, and he was not so implicitly delighted by Swinburne. He wrote of him: "He is not subtle: and I don't see any internal centre from which springs anything that he does. He will make a great name, but whether he is to distinguish himself solidly as an artist, I would not willingly prognosticate." In this dubious attitude, Meredith remained during the rest of his life; in fact, why should it be concealed that the two men ultimately "got upon the nerves" of each other? Nevertheless, in 1862, they still had much in common, and Swinburne was a frequent visitor at Corsham, while Meredith had his own room in Tudor House.

The *Spectator*, in an article violently unjust, "slated" Meredith's *Modern Love*, thus provoking from Swinburne the long, generous, and rather redundant "Letter to the Editor," which really amounted to a second review of the book, cancelling the first. It is very interesting to note that in printing this defence of Meredith (June 7th, 1862), the editor (doubtless R. H. Hutton himself) described Swinburne, whose name, let

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it be recalled, had been appended to no previous prose production, as one "whose opinion on any poetical question should be worth more than most men's."

The principal adventures in Swinburne's career were the electric shocks which he received by running up against masterpieces. Early in this year 1862, he discovered, through the instrumentality of Rossetti, and in circumstances which he himself and several others have described, the hidden beauties of FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát*, published in 1859. The form of the Persian quatrain charmed him, and led almost immediately (as Meredith picturesquely described in the latest public letter of his life) to the composition of *Laus Veneris*. This was the most sustained lyrical poem which Swinburne had yet produced, and from a technical point of view by far the most accomplished; and it is interesting to observe that while it is in no sense an imitation of Omar Khayyam, but on the contrary entirely characteristic of Swinburne himself, it has the aura of the *Rubáiyát* thrown over it like a transparent tissue. About the same date he met for the first time with *Leaves of Grass*, lent him, I believe, by George Howard (afterwards the ninth earl of Carlisle) to whom a copy of the folio of 1855 had been sent. Whitman had, up to that time, scarcely been heard of in England. Swinburne was filled with enthusiasm, and sent over to America for a copy of his own, which was obtained not without some difficulty. This he ultimately presented to his friend and physician, Dr. George Bird, when he had secured

a later and fuller collection. When this came he wrote to Monckton Milnes (August 18th, 1862):

> Have you seen the latest edition of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*? for there is one new poem in it, "A Voice from the Sea," about two birds on the sea-beach, which I really think is the most lovely and wonderful thing I have read for years and years. I could rhapsodise about it for ten more pages, for there is such beautiful skill and subtle power in every word of it, but I spare you!

This may be set against the ungracious recantation of later years, to which reference will have to be made.

In the summer of 1862 a distinguished party assembled at Fryston; it included Venables, James Spedding, the newly-appointed Archbishop of York (William Thomson) and Thackeray, the latter having brought his two young daughters, afterwards Lady Ritchie and Mrs. Leslie Stephen. Lady Ritchie recalls for me that the Houghtons stimulated the curiosity of their guests by describing the young poet, who was to arrive later. She was in the garden on the afternoon of his arrival, and she saw him advance up the sloping lawn, swinging his hat in his hand, and letting the sunshine flood the bush of his red-gold hair. He looked like Apollo or a fairy prince; and immediately attracted the approval of Mr. Thackeray by the wit and wisdom of his conversation, as much as that of the two young ladies by his playfulness. On Sunday evening, after dinner, he was asked to read some of his poems. His

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choice was injudicious; he is believed to have recited "The Leper"; it is certain that he read "Les Noyades." At this the Archbishop of York made so shocked a face that Thackeray smiled and whispered to Lord Houghton, while the two young ladies, who had never heard such sentiments expressed before, giggled aloud in their excitement. Their laughter offended the poet, who, however, was soothed by Lady Houghton's tactfully saying, "Well, Mr. Swinburne, if you *will* read such extraordinary things, you must expect us to laugh." "Les Noyades" was then proceeding on its amazing course, and the Archbishop was looking more and more horrified, when suddenly the butler—"like an avenging angel," as Lady Ritchie says—threw open the door and announced, "Prayers! my Lord!"

Lady Ritchie dwells on Swinburne's "kind and cordial ways" during this amusing visit to Fryston. She had never seen anybody so disconcerting or so charming, and when Thackeray and his daughters had to take their leave, while Swinburne remained at Fryston, the future author of *The Story of Elizabeth* burst into tears. The friendship so begun continued until the day of the poet's death, though they met rarely. It appears from Lady Ritchie's recollection that Thackeray must have been shown some of Swinburne's MS. poems by Lord Houghton, for he expressed his admiration of them. He died, as we know, a few months later, too soon to see any of them in print, except those which were printed in the *Spectator* in the course of this year, 1862.

With the end of the year there unfortunately came a misunderstanding with the *Spectator*. The editor was beginning to take alarm at the sans-culottism of his brilliant contributor. A burlesque review of an imaginary volume of French poetry was refused, as indeed was inevitable. Swinburne replied that "sanity and decency are the two props of my critical faculty" and that the principles of the *Spectator* offended his moral sense. The outraged editor involved himself in his toga, and Master Algernon was invited no more to that tea-party. He had, however, tasted printer's ink, and enunciated the very reasonable wish that "I could find some paper or review where I could write at my own times and in my own way occasional studies on matters of art and literature of which I could speak confidently." But in a country teeming with penny-a-liners there was apparently no room for a real writer, and eight years more were to pass before an editor was inspired to invite prose contributions from Swinburne's pen.

In the spring of 1862 Algernon had joined his family in the Pyrenees, and stayed some weeks at Cauterets. During this time he visited the mysterious lake of Gaube, and indulged in "the flight of his limbs through the still strong chill of the darkness from shore to shore," to the horror of the natives, who had a tradition that to bathe in Gaube was to court certain death. It would be difficult, and is not needful here, to follow the young poet through all his peregrinations in the year 1863. Not much of it was spent in London. He was paying his usual Christmas visit to

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Northumberland, when the alarming illness of Edith, his second sister, called him, with the rest of the family, to Bournemouth. She rallied, and in February her brother returned to London; in March we find him in Paris, writing his sonnet called "Hermaphroditus" in the Louvre. It was on this occasion that he made the acquaintance of Fantin-Latour and began a cordial friendship with Whistler. This was presently confirmed by Whistler's return to England and his settlement in Chelsea, where Swinburne immediately brought him into relation with Rossetti. Whistler's mother, a lady of noble presence and admirable sweetness of character, welcomed Algernon at her house, and was at this time of great practical service to him. Among his associates was now the painter and draughtsman, Frederick Sandys, who was familiar with both Rossetti and Whistler. Swinburne wrote some verses called *Cleopatra* to a drawing by Frederick Sandys which appeared as a wood-cut in the *Cornhill Magazine* in September 1866, and as late as 1868 he defended in fiery accents Sandys' famous picture "Medea," which had been rejected from the Royal Academy exhibition. The acquaintanceship soon afterwards lapsed.

Considerable anxiety had now begun to be felt about Algernon's health, which was less and less satisfactory. He began to suffer occasionally from a malady which seemed to be exclusively brought on by the excitements of London life. There was always, I believe, a difference of opinion among the doctors as to the actual nature of this disease, which was, however, epileptiform.

It took the shape of a convulsive fit, in which, generally after a period of very great cerebral excitement, he would suddenly fall unconscious. These fits were excessively distressing to witness, and produced a shock of alarm, all the more acute because of the deathlike appearance of the patient. Oddly enough, however, the person who seemed to suffer from them least was Swinburne himself. The only real danger appeared to be that he would hit himself in his fall, which indeed he repeatedly and severely did. But his general recovery after these fits was magical, and it positively struck one—if it is not absurd to say so—that he was better after them, as after a storm of the nerves.

One such attack came on in Whistler's studio, and Mrs. Whistler nursed the patient back to health with tender solicitude. But the doctors represented both to her and to Rossetti, who had long been growing anxious, that it was important for Algernon to be away from London and its agitations as much as possible. He had now started a *magnum opus*, and that could be as successfully conducted in the country as in Tudor House. He therefore left London, practically for the remainder of 1863, staying first through long summer weeks at Tintagel with the landscape-painter J. W. Inchbold, a man of serene and gentle temper peculiarly suited to calm the troubled soul of the over-agitated poet. Here, while Inchbold was quietly painting, Swinburne swam in the Cornish sea or galloped on horseback along the cliffs, murmuring verses which were beginning to take choral and dramatic shape and to foreshadow *Atalanta in Calydon*.

His health was once more all that could be desired. Inchbold and he lodged and boarded austerely in the village schoolhouse, twenty-two miles from a railway and six from the nearest post-town, Camelford. From Cornwall in October Swinburne proceeded, with the beginning of *Atalanta* in his pocket, to his cousins at Niton in the Isle of Wight, and in their house he stayed until February 1864, when his great drama was completed to his satisfaction.

On the 25th of September 1863, Miss Edith Swinburne had died, and the rest of the family left East Dene for a long tour on the Continent, leaving Algernon with his cousins. During this visit to the Isle of Wight, he was engaged, not merely on *Atalanta in Calydon*, but on the joint production, with his cousin, Miss Mary Gordon (afterwards Mrs. Disney Leith), of an anonymous story called *The Children of the Chapel*. Miss Gordon was the main author, but Algernon made suggestions and gave endless references and information. He wrote, moreover, the whole of the verses, which include a morality play, called *The Pilgrimage of Pleasure*. This is an astonishingly brilliant piece of *pastiche*, reproducing the versification, language, and tone of the nondescript Elizabethan interludes of about 1575, with an art which probably no other person in England could have equalled. Nothing could be odder than to find a work of such learning and elegance unobtrusively buried in an anonymous story for children. The little volume, which has now become extremely scarce, was issued by an obscure bookseller in the City in 1864.

Algernon Swinburne joined his family in Italy immediately after leaving the Isle of Wight in the February of that year. After a short stay at Genoa, he arrived at Florence early in March, and one of his earliest acts was to call on the aged Walter Savage Landor, armed with a letter of introduction from Milnes (who had now become Lord Houghton). With some difficulty he discovered "the most ancient of the demi-gods" in his lodging at 93 Via della Chiesa, but the visit was not a success. Landor was now in his ninetieth year, and, like other very old men, easily bewildered. The unknown little poet, with his great aureole of fluffed red hair, burst into his presence with protestations of worship, and, flinging himself on both knees before the old man, implored his blessing. Landor was so feeble and deprecating, so perplexed and uncomfortable, that Swinburne withdrew "in a grievous state of disappointment and depression," fearing that he "was really too late." But, taking heart of grace, he wrote next day a letter of apology and explanation, "expressing (as far as was expressible) my immense admiration and reverence in the plainest and sincerest way I could manage." The result was a note of invitation which Swinburne answered by setting out then and there for Landor's lodging.

This second excursion was crowned with complete success. The old man had had time to recover from his agitation and to realise the meaning of the incident. Swinburne "found him at last, brilliant and altogether delicious as I suppose others may have found him twenty

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years since." As he was to write when, six months later, Landor died :

I came as one whose thoughts half linger,
Half run before ;
The youngest to the oldest singer
That England bore.

I found him whom I shall not find
Till all grief end,
In holiest age our mightiest mind,
Father and friend.

In a letter written the same day as his second visit (March 4th, 1864) Swinburne tells Lord Houghton :

If both or either should die tomorrow, at least today he has told me that my presence has made him happy ; he said more than that—things for which of course I take no credit to myself but which are not the less pleasant to hear from such a man. There is no other man living from whom I should so much have prized any expression of acceptance or goodwill in return for my homage, for all other men as great are so much younger that in his case one sort of reverence serves as the lining for another. My grandfather was upon the whole *mieux conservé*, but he had written no " Hellenics." In answer to something that Mr. Landor said today of his own age, I reminded him of his equals and predecessors, Sophocles and Titian ; he said he should not live up to the age of Sophocles, not see ninety. I don't see why he shouldn't, if he has people about him to care for him as he should be cared for. I should like to throw up all other things on earth and devote myself to playing valet to him for the rest of his days. I would black his boots if he were *chez moi*. He has given me the shock of adoration which one feels at thirteen towards great men.

Landor talked to his young visitor with great freedom, and, in relation to the approach of death at his own advanced age, remarked that he had no belief in the immortality of the soul nor opinion about it, but "was sure of one thing, that whatever was to come was best—the right thing, or the thing that ought to come." He was delighted with Swinburne's enthusiasm for the cause of Italian freedom, and gave him several copies of his unpublished dialogue in Italian, *Savonarola e Il Priore di San Marco* (1860), which the Tuscan Government had suppressed, "through priestly influence," as the author told Swinburne. He referred with patient scorn to the obloquy and insult, "asses' kicks aimed at his head," which reached him from England, and acknowledged that "the sincere tribute of genuine and studious admiration" was still gratifying to his head and to his heart. Before long, the aged poet addressed Swinburne as his "dear friend"; "let me now and ever call you so," he said with pathetic emphasis.

When the interview had lasted a very long time, while the aged poet yielded more and more completely to the fascination of his youthful visitor, Landor said, impressively, "Sir, this meeting must be commemorated. I hereby present to you that Correggio hanging on the wall. It is a masterpiece that was intercepted on its way back to its Florentine home from the Louvre, whither it had been taken by Napoleon Bonaparte." Swinburne protested that he needed no such form of memorial. The interview, without any such aid, would be indelibly fixed upon

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his memory. But this did not suit his imperious host. After Landor had insisted time after time, and time after time Swinburne had refused to deprive him of the treasure, Landor rose, and turning purple with anger, shouted, "By God, sir, you shall!" So Swinburne said no more, and the picture was sent to his hotel. He brought it back to England, but it was a worthless daub, one of the strange artistic delusions of Landor's extreme old age. What became of it seems to be unknown; Correggio or no Correggio, it would have an amusing association with two eminent and wilful persons.

Swinburne stayed some weeks in Florence, where he visited pictures in the delightful company of Mrs. Gaskell. Long afterwards he told me that she was the only person who sympathised with his raptures over the "Medusa" of Leonardo da Vinci: unfortunately the cruel art-critics now will have it that this panel was never touched by Leonardo. Of the drawings in the Uffizi he made a close study, and his notes were long valuable in the absence of any other catalogue or manual. He made the acquaintance of Mr. Seymour Kirkup (1788–1880), "the saviour of Giotto, the redeemer of Dante," with whom Swinburne enjoyed long conversations about Blake, whom Kirkup had known intimately, and about Keats, at whose funeral he had taken part. He paid a visit to Fiesole, where, deafened by noonday nightingales in a high-walled garden, he recorded that he wrote *Itylus*.[1] He passed on to Siena, which made upon him a deeper

[1] But Ruskin is said to have possessed a MS. of *Itylus* dated 1863.

impression than any other Italian city, "lady loveliest of my loves," a city to be the subject of one of the noblest of all his poems. Whether he saw much more of Landor is not remembered, but before finally leaving Florence he dedicated to the aged poet a sonnet which is here for the first time published :

The stateliest singing mouth that speaks our tongue,
The lordliest, and the brow of loftiest leaf
Worn after the great fashion close and brief,
Sounds and shines yet ; to whom all braids belong
Of plaited laurel that no weathers wrong,
All increase of the spring and of the sheaf,
All high delight and godliness of grief,
All bloom and fume of summer and of song.
The years are of his household ; Fate and Fame
Observe him ; and the things of pestilence
Die out of fear, that could not die of shame,
Before his heel be set on their offence :
Time's hand shall hoard the gold of such a name
When Death has blown the dust of base men thence.

Returning in the autumn of 1864 to London, Swinburne joined his friends at Tudor House for a while. But the importance of this arrangement has been exaggerated in legend. His tenancy lasted but two years, during which time his absence much exceeded his residence. The Pre-Raphaelites had not been well advised in sharing their domestic bliss ; there were too many plums in their pudding. Swinburne and George Meredith developed, in particular, a remarkable incompatibility of temper. They parted, rarely to meet again until 1898, when, on occasion of Meredith's seventieth birthday, there was a reconciliation by letter, and Swinburne

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accepted an invitation to Box Hill. Rossetti himself, though no misunderstanding obscured his almost parental affection for "my little Northumbrian friend," found Swinburne a tempestuous inmate. I heard him say long afterwards, in reference to this time, "Algernon used to drive me crazy by dancing all over the studio like a wild cat." The whole situation has been described to me as "pandemonium." Swinburne was often a prey to fits of ungovernable fury. More than once the decorative artist, John Hungerford Pollen (1820–1902), was called in from his house in Pembridge Crescent "by his self-contained gentleness to allay the storm."

Swinburne found lodgings at 124 Mount Street, over a court milliner's, moving later to 22A Dorset Street, which was his London home for four or five years. He spent another autumn in Cornwall, staying with Jowett at Kynance Cove and at St. Michael's Mount. Here he finished, doubtless with the help of Jowett's revision, the long dedication in Greek of *Atalanta in Calydon* to Walter Savage Landor: "Never any more shall I sit beside thee, touching thy pure hands with awe," he says in it, and he delivers the body of his sacred friend, fallen by the Etruscan wave, to the tender care of the Pierides, and of the dancing Muses, and of Aphrodite, who delighted in the austere beauty of his songs.

Cartoon for Glass, designed by D. G. Rossetti
containing portraits of A. C. Swinburne and Christina Rossetti

CHAPTER IV

ATALANTA IN CALYDON. CHASTELARD

AT the beginning of 1865 the printing of *Atalanta in Calydon* was completed, but there followed a long delay in connection with the binding, which D. G. Rossetti had designed. Bertram Payne, who was now responsible for the firm of Moxon, believed that the only hope of success which the poem offered lay in the beauty of its appearance, and accordingly no pains were spared to adorn the ivory-white sides of the buckram cover with mystic golden spheres. A limited number of copies, it is said one hundred, were manufactured, and the drama was at length issued, towards the end of April, with no anticipations on the publisher's part. But much had changed since the fiasco of 1860. Algernon Swinburne was no longer perfectly unknown; he was the object of curiosity in a small but very active circle, and already the legend of his superhuman cleverness and superdiabolic audacity had spread beyond the limit of his acquaintances. Moreover, Algernon had now a powerful friend, who was determined that the catastrophe of *The Queen Mother* should not be repeated. Lord

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Houghton, in the common phrase, "knew everybody," and was an indefatigable wire-puller. He set his heart on making *Atalanta* the principal literary sensation of 1865, and it was.

Conditions of taste had altered in the five years since Swinburne made his first vain appeal to the public. The intentions of the Pre-Raphaelites, both in painting and poetry, were no longer entirely unintelligible or held worthy of mere angry ridicule. Where Morris, Swinburne, and Meredith had failed to penetrate the Philistine fortress, Christina Rossetti in her *Goblin Market* (1862) had succeeded. Ruskin had grown to be a recognised authority, and he brought the Pre-Raphaelites in his wake; he was known to have an almost extravagant admiration of the new poet. Matthew Arnold's lectures at Oxford had caused a wide awakening; people who had thought it crafty to extinguish each glimmering taper that made itself apparent were now anxious to look out for new poets and to court unparalleled sensations. There was a widespread revolt against the tyranny of Tennyson, whose *Enoch Arden* (1864) had seemed to many hitherto dutiful worshippers an intolerable concession to commonplace ideals. Robert Browning, after a long period of silence, had spoken again in a volume which showed him to be in full sympathy with revolutionary methods of style. *Atalanta*, "the pure among women," arrived in Paternoster Row at a moment as auspicious as that in which her prototype walked over lowland and lawn from Arcadia to Calydon

northward. The reviewers were practically unanimous, and Swinburne shot like a rocket into celebrity.

Of all Swinburne's works, *Atalanta in Calydon* has remained the best known and most enjoyed by the ordinary reader. The lyrical passages are abundant, and they are well adapted to display the startling originalities of the poet's metre in their most pleasing shape. The legend is clear and romantic, of a great simplicity, and yet full of the elements of passion. The recitative is composed in blank verse, which is astonishing in its lucidity and dignity and music. The morality was objected to as defective by some reviewers, but merely in connection with the attitude of the poet towards the gods and divine influences in general, to a consideration of which we shall presently return. But the refinement of the sentiments and the dignity of the language attributed to the characters were of the most admirable kind, and the poet evidently aimed in this respect at a rivalry with the sacred enthusiasm of Aeschylus and the serene elevation of Sophocles.

There had not been written since the *Prometheus Unbound* of Shelley a drama on the model of Greek antiquity which could be compared with the new play. We must go to more recent experiments in French drama, as, for example, to the remarkable tragedies of Moréas, to find anything comparable with *Atalanta in Calydon*. The choral plays of Milton, even, have little in common with the achievements of the early Greeks, and their sublime imagery and their

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moral splendour are remote, in form at least, from the aims and outlines of Hellenic tragedy which Swinburne, with extreme adroitness, contrived to capture. His knowledge of the text of Aeschylus was extraordinarily close and sympathetic. His marvellous memory enabled him to carry practically the whole of the *Oresteia* in his mind, and there are those still living who recollect, as an astonishing feat, his ability to "spout" the plays of Aeschylus in Greek as long as any auditor had the patience to listen to him.

His scholarship, as we are told by those best qualified to judge—and Jowett is said to have been of this number—was not exact in the grammatical sense; he was no Scaliger or Bentley. But it sufficed to enable him, with intense gusto, to enjoy and to retain the beauties of the poets, to understand their work from the inner point of view. He was able to speak of Shelley, whose feeling for Greek verse he admitted to have been delicate in the extreme, as one whose "scholarship was yet that of a clever but idle boy in the upper forms of a public school." Critics have sometimes spoken of Swinburne as though his own knowledge of Greek was of the same kind, but this is certainly a mistake. Thirlwall, as we shall see, did his Landorian elegiacs justice, and there can be little doubt that Swinburne's mind and memory were more deeply immersed in the poetry of the ancients than that of any other English poet, more than that of Milton, or even of Landor. Moreover, we must not forget to observe the excellent economy which Swinburne reintroduced into this order of writing by the

carefully balanced form of *Atalanta*. It was a protest against the shapelessness of the "spasmodical" types of lyrical but essentially untheatrical drama, such as were much admired at that time, though forgotten now. We speak not of Arnold's admirable *Empedocles*; but some of us still recall Swinburne's attitude towards Alexander Smith's *Life Drama*, Sydney Dobell's *Balder*, and the whole set of rhapsodical works of which they were the type. We know how resolutely and designedly he set his face against their excesses.

Swinburne adopted for his great choral drama one of the most romantic stories of late Homeric Greece, and one which seems to have stimulated with peculiar freshness and purity the imagination of the ancients. When Pausanias was in Arcadia he visited the city of Tegea, and found there a temple which far excelled all its fellows in the Peloponnesus, whether for size or beauty. This was the fane of Athena Alea, built in the highest style of late magnificence by Scopas the Parian, who introduced into it all the orders of architecture, and produced a gorgeous structure in which Doric, Corinthian, and Ionic were combined in harmony. On the front gable, in the centre of the whole composition, he presented the Hunt of the Boar of Calydon, and there were to be seen in effigy the "snowy-souled" Atalanta; Meleager, type of the robust hunter of the woods; and the evil brethren of Queen Althaea. Pausanias does not describe the arrangement of the group, but we cannot doubt that the moment chosen by the sculptor was that when, after the

death of the boar, Meleager pushed the brothers aside and

> With great hands grasping all that weight of hair
> Cast down the dead heap clanging and collapsed
> At female feet, saying, This thy spoil, not mine,
> Maiden, thine own hand for thyself hath reaped,
> And all this praise God gives thee,

since the incident was the one which the sanctuary most mysteriously venerated, while the very tusks of the boar itself, held to be the sacred treasure of Athena Alea, were preserved within until Augustus impiously carried them away to Rome.

It is almost certain that Ovid — of whom Swinburne never speaks, so far as I remember, with approval—has no right to be considered responsible for *Atalanta in Calydon*. The courtly sweetness and scented grace of Ovid were particularly what the young English poet did not wish to reproduce in his study of austere and archaic ritual. But it can but be interesting to compare the elaborate version of the story, as we get it in the eighth book of the *Metamorphoses*, with Swinburne's plot. We must not overlook the fact that Ovid adds very much which Homer, in the ninth *Iliad*, omits or gives more vaguely, nor that the English poet accepts the general Ovidian outline of the story. The paramount influence of Althaea, as the tool of the gods in their sinister revenge, is as much emphasised in one poem as in the other, although Swinburne, with superior art, introduces Althaea to us on the very threshold of his drama, while Ovid forgets to mention her existence until after the death of Plexippus and Toxeus. But when she does

appear in the *Metamorphoses*, the rôle she fills is just as effective as that of the Swinburnian Althaea. It may be remarked that Ovid dedicates one of his finest passages of purely descriptive verse to the lair of the Calydonian monster. The English poet's picture of the scene of the flaying of the Boar seems to have been written in direct competition with this, and fine as is Ovid's description of the ozier-beds and the hollows of the rain-sodden brushwood, still finer is the English poet's picture of the place where

> . . . much sweet grass grew higher than grew the reed,
> And good for slumber, and every holier herb,
> Narcissus, and the low-lying melilote,
> And all of goodliest blade and bloom that springs
> Where, hid by heavier hyacinth, violet buds
> Blossom and burn; and fire of yellower flowers
> And light of crescent lilies, and such leaves
> As fear the Faun's and know the Dryad's foot;
> Olive and ivy and poplar dedicate,
> And many a well-spring over-watched of these.

One great and obvious improvement Swinburne makes, while otherwise keeping very close to the outlines of the old tale. In the Greek versions Meleager has a wife, named Cleopatra, who attends his last moments as his spirit is passing out of the smouldering brand. The presence of this lady, who was ultimately transformed into a kingfisher, would have been a most incongruous element in that last magnificent chorus round the dying hero. Swinburne ejected Cleopatra from his scheme, and Meleager is the wild hunter of the woods, who has never stooped to the lure of woman till he is smitten by the eyes and hair of Atalanta.

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To this drama were prefixed the two pieces of elegiac Greek verse addressed to Landor. Over these Swinburne had taken very great pains. When Lord Houghton was preparing to review the poem for the *Edinburgh Review*, Swinburne was afraid that these Greek compositions might escape attention, as Houghton made no pretence to being an expert. At the poet's suggestion, Houghton applied to Connop Thirlwall, Bishop of St. David's, for an opinion. The Bishop read *Atalanta*, and came to dinner with Lord Houghton to talk it over, expressing himself in the meantime as follows. No more interesting proof of the effect Swinburne produced on the learned world of letters in 1865 could be adduced than is contained in this private letter from the famous author of the *History of Greece* :

> The Greek verses are . . . of a very high order of merit, and both in their strength and weakness worthy of the poem itself, as here and there they seem to reflect some of the peculiarities of its diction, though there are also a few lines which I believe for other reasons a Greek would not have written. I should like to know a little about the author. He must be a young man, but it would be psychically interesting to ascertain until what time of life such a man can continue to regard Landor as by far the greatest of all poets. . . . I am still more curious to know to what kind of reactionary school the author belongs. Somehow I cannot fancy him to be a stiff Churchman or an obscurantist Romanist ; still less as an intolerant Puritan ; and yet he takes the side of the old, now pretty nearly antiquated, orthodoxy which thought itself in peril if it admitted that there was anything good and holy, or in fact, not diabolical, in the Pagan religion.

This was a charge calculated to surprise the poet, but Thirlwall supported it on the ground that the austere sentiment is not

> . . . put in the mouth of one of the characters in the drama, where it might simply have heightened the tragic effect; but is enunciated by the chorus, and therefore must be the poet's last word and his way of expressing the national sentiment. Both as a Philhellene and as a liberal theologian I repudiate this imputation. Even from the purely poetical point of view it seems to me a mistake. The tragic action, as it seems to me, is not brought out in stronger relief, but rather effaced by the intense unbroken murkiness of the background.

Our answer to the Bishop's acute criticism must be that to Swinburne the real tragic action lay not around the slaying of the Boar and the evaporation of Meleager, but precisely in the struggle with theological tyranny which drives his chorus to lift its voices in despair and revolt. No doubt this was an idea which would, as Thirlwall said, have made Aeschylus stare and Sophocles shudder, but Euripides might surely have entertained it. After much consideration, Thirlwall wrote on the Greek elegiacs two paragraphs, which Houghton incorporated in his review. It must have given Swinburne intense gratification to be told, by so eminent a Grecian, that his thoughts moved " with scarcely less ease and freedom in the language and measures of Callinus and Mimnermus than in his native speech." It was a salve to the sore wound which stung the persistent undergraduate of Balliol whenever he thought of his inglorious exit from Oxford.

The attitude towards theology, which Thirlwall

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so strangely misunderstood, and which F. D. Maurice and others strenuously deprecated, was part of that revolt against the traditions of official religion which had immediately followed Swinburne's abrupt rejection of Anglicanism when he was at Oxford. It is not to be overlooked that he had a mind which had passed through the discipline of a training that was rigorously devout. He differed from those pagans of indifferent heart, who have never known, and do not care to comprehend, the faith of the fervent Catholic or Puritan. Swinburne was deeply instructed in the text and teaching of the Bible, and it is noticeable that there is a distinct strain of the religious controversialist running through his poems. It is true that it expresses itself in antagonism, but it is violently there; the poet is not a lotus-eater who has never known the Gospel, but an evangelist turned inside out.

In the great choruses and tirades of *Atalanta* the absolute negation of free will is progressively insisted upon. We have the lugubrious and melodious expression of a fatalism that far surpasses that of Aeschylus, and is completely Oriental. Blind chance, an impersonal *moira* against which the gods themselves contend in vain, tosses the faint human creature, as a wave tosses a breaking bubble. There is no equity, no foresight, no method in the fate of mortals, for

> . . . the Gods love not justice more than fate,
> And smite the righteous and the violent mouth,
> And mix with insolent blood the reverent man's,
> And bruise the holier as the lying lips.

There is some confusion about this inexorable

destiny, which is sometimes spoken of as above the gods, and sometimes as being God itself. But the only independence that Man can prove, the only dignity that he can show, is, during the brief interval between birth and death, to live according to the guidance of the inward light, and defy the *moira*. But the singing huntsmen do not conceal from themselves the hopelessness of the struggle and the darkness at the end of the vista, and they turn, in the most majestic of their choruses, with the exultation of a vain defiance, to shake their fists against the unregarding Power:

> Because thou art cruel and men are piteous,
> And our hands labour and thine hand scattereth;
> Lo, with hearts rent and knees made tremulous,
> Lo, with ephemeral lips and casual breath,
> At least we witness of thee ere we die
> That these things are not otherwise, but thus;
> That each man in his heart sigheth, and saith,
> That all men even as I,
> All we are against thee, against thee, O God most high!

It was fresh from the emotion of listening to these vociferous lamentations that Ruskin wrote to a friend: "Have you read *Atalanta*? The grandest thing ever done by a youth,—though he is a Demoniac youth!"

In *Atalanta in Calydon* a new poetic voice was heard in England, a voice so full and pure and vibrating that no one could for a moment question its importance. As a matter of fact, no one did question it; what was remarkable was the unanimity with which the young and the old, the critics and the public, vied in welcoming a poet more supple and palpitating than any other

who had appeared since Shelley. Swinburne was compared at once with that unrivalled master, but he could endure the comparison, since, if the new methods were less ethereal than the old ones, they were richer and more vehement. Nothing so swift had been heard in English poetry before as sounded in the almost superhuman choruses of *Atalanta*. It may be well to remind ourselves of what the most learned of our prosodists, then an undergraduate at Oxford, has recorded of the effect of these bounding and doubling "verse-hounds." Saintsbury says:

> Every weapon and every sleight of the English poet—equivalence and substitution, alternative and repetition, rhymes and rhymeless suspension of sound, volley and check of verse, stanza construction, line- and pause-moulding, foot-conjunction and contrast,—this poet knows and can use them all. The triple rhyme itself, that springe for the unwary, gives him no difficulty.

There are many lovers of poetry to-day who would confess that their apprenticeship to the mysteries of such melody as lies hidden in the woven texture of English speech began in their appreciation of "When the hounds of spring," and "Who hath given man speech," and "Behold thou art over fair, thou art over wise," or perhaps most of all the inestimable recitative around the dying body of Meleager, with its violin-like, wailing harmonies:

> For the dead man no home is;
> Ah, better to be
> What the flower of the foam is
> In fields of the sea,
> That the sea-waves might be as my raiment, the gulf-stream a garment for me.

Who shall seek thee and bring
And restore thee thy day,
When the dove dipt her wing
And the oars won their way,
Where the narrowing Symplegades whitened the straits of Propontis with spray?

These gave promise of magnificent music, which was not belied by the freshness of *Poems and Ballads* or by the maturity of *Songs before Sunrise.*

The season of 1865 was made very pleasant to the young poet by the fame which attended his success. He went out a good deal into society, and stayed longer in town than he was accustomed to do. His friends were again made a little anxious by his racketing, and wished to get him down into the country. To some mild reproaches from Lord Houghton, Swinburne replied that he should soon "be again cultivating the calmer virtues at Holm Wood." This was a house in the neighbourhood of Henley-on-Thames, which Admiral Swinburne had now decided to take, in the place of the old home in the Isle of Wight, which was now given up. Holmwood was a comfortable but not pretentious country-house, which the Admiral leased from the executors of Maria Josepha, Lady Stanley of Alderley, Gibbon's friend, whose southern residence it had been.

In the summer, the French painter, C. F. Daubigny, came over to London, on the invitation of Leighton, at whose house, it is possible, Swinburne met him first. At all events, an acquaintance sprang up between them, and the

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English poet was gratified by the sympathy of the French painter. Eminent foreign artists were not at that date frequently welcomed to this country, and Daubigny's visit was something of a sensation. "He expressed himself much taken with my French songs, which were shown to him by a friend to whom I had lent them." These were the lyrics in *Chastelard*, which now (July 1865) was going through the press, together with a second edition of *Atalanta in Calydon*. The latter was to have been adorned by an etched portrait of Swinburne by Whistler, but this was not forthcoming.

On one of his visits to his publisher, Algernon met an old man who, now that Landor had died, was the last survivor of the poets born before the close of the eighteenth century. This was Bryan Waller Procter, now in his 78th year; as "Barry Cornwall" and author of songs and "dramatic scenes," he had been almost famous in the age of Keats and Hunt. His daughter, Adelaide Ann, had achieved still greater popularity before her death the preceding year. Swinburne "got on with him, as I always do with old men—another of my Spartan virtues. Mr. Procter was charming *et me disait choses ravissantes*, but mourned over the hard work of seven hours a day at his Life of Charles Lamb," a biography which appeared in 1866. The old poet was not less charmed with Algernon, who was soon introduced to the wonderful Mrs. Procter, "Our Lady of Bitterness," becoming a frequent visitor to them both until Procter's infirmities closed the house to company. When "Barry Cornwall" died, in 1874, Swinburne

paid to his memory the respect of one of the most beautiful of all his elegies.

In the late summer of 1865, Swinburne spent a pleasant holiday with Lord Houghton at Fryston, and said farewell for the time being to a friend who occupied a large part in his acquaintance, and has not yet been mentioned. This was Richard Burton, to whom, on his return from his consulate at Fernando Po, Algernon had been presented by Lord Houghton. These two men, externally so dissimilar, had taken an instant fancy to one another. Burton, who was by sixteen years Swinburne's senior, was a personage of virile adventure, the hero of mysterious exploits in Asia and in Africa; he was Al-Haj Abdullah, the enchanted pilgrim who had penetrated to the holy city of Mecca. He represented in action everything of which Swinburne had only dreamed. But, on his side, Burton possessed a passionate love of literature, in which he was doomed by a radical inaptitude of style never to excel, and he recognised, without envy, but with the most generous enthusiasm, those gifts which he vainly desired for himself exhibited to an almost superhuman degree by his sedentary associate.

Accordingly, between these two men there grew up a strong friendship, which lasted for the rest of Burton's life. They met frequently at the house of Dr. George Bird, from which Burton had been married in 1861. The Arundells, Mrs. Burton's parents, were strict Catholics, and while they treated Swinburne affectionately, they were occasionally shocked by his diatribes. One night, at Dr. Bird's house in Welbeck Street,

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after some extravagant rodomontade of Swinburne's, Mr. Arundell felt obliged to intervene. "Young Sir," he said, in a very solemn tone, "If you talk like that, you will die like a dog!" "Oh!" replied Algernon, clasping his hands together, "don't say 'like a dog'—do say 'like a cat!'" Swinburne's relations with Richard Burton at this time were charming; the two had so much to say to one another, and so many stories to tell, and jokes to exchange, that they used to be good-naturedly allowed to sit by themselves in an inner room, from which the rest of the company would be tantalised to hear proceeding roars and shrieks of laughter, followed by earnest rapid talk of a quieter description.

Association with Burton was, however, not good for Swinburne, intellectually or physically. Burton, a giant of endurance, and possessed at times with a kind of dionysiac frenzy, was no fortunate company for a nervous and yet spirited man like Swinburne. Houghton, observing with anxiety a situation which he had created, rejoiced when Burton received a new consular appointment that took him to South America. Swinburne, in response to warnings, wrote: "As my tempter and favourite audience has gone to Santos, I may hope to be a good boy again. I may have shaken the thyrsus in your face. But after this half I mean to be no end good." The long visit to Fryston freshened him, and then, after a short stay in town, through the feverish heat of August, while *Chastelard* was going through the press, he descended upon his family in Oxfordshire, and "all," as he used to say, was once

more "joy and peace and love." The antithesis between London and the country, between the "roses and raptures" and the "lilies and languors," was now absolutely complete; and those who merely saw him, shaking the thyrsus, in Dorset Street could not recognise as the same person the discreet and sober student who shepherded his fancies at Holmwood.

At this time Swinburne became intimate with Joseph Knight (1829–1907), who was introduced to him by Purnell. Knight's great love of poetry, and in particular his extraordinary knowledge of dramatic literature, made him a sympathetic companion, and his fine appearance and courtesy of manner were very attractive. He was then living as a journalist, and mainly writing for the *Literary Gazette*; it was Knight who introduced Swinburne to Mr. John Morley, and in several other ways was serviceable to him.

In a letter to E. C. Stedman (February 20th, 1875) Swinburne wrote: "*Atalanta* was begun the very day after I had given the last touch to *Chastelard*." This statement, categorical as it is, must not be taken too literally. What it means, no doubt, is that in the autumn of 1863, feeling that the images and cadences of *Atalanta* were crowding on his imagination, he pulled the scenes of *Chastelard* together, to get them off his mind. But quite late in 1865 we find him still modifying and interpolating passages in that drama, which had been more or less continuously on the stocks ever since he was at Balliol in 1858. It is difficult to realise, in face of the smoothness

and simplicity of *Chastelard*, that it took seven years to compose it to its author's liking. This was the earliest of the numerous studies of the character and life of Mary Queen of Scots, which he was to produce in prose and verse. Those clear eyes of "a swordblade's blue," which moved so many hearts to madness at the close of the sixteenth century, reigned like stars in the firmament of Swinburne's imagination. Mary Stuart was the only figure in pure history to which he ever gave minute attention, but his study of her character and adventures was so close and so clairvoyant that it has received the grudging praise of professional historians, who are never ready to believe that poets can know anything definite about history.

In this case, the young poet's worship of the memory of Mary Queen of Scots was no new or light emotion. Like almost every one of the deepest and most durable of Swinburne's infatuations, it began in his boyhood. The romance which hung about the history of his Border ancestors extended to the legend that Thomas Swinburne of Capheaton had taken arms for the defence of Mary Stuart somewhere between Lochleven and Langside, and had succumbed to the irresistible charm of her presence. A boyish excursion to the fortalice in Roxburghshire, which is celebrated as the scene of Mary's dashing visit to the wounded Bothwell, was the occasion upon which the chivalrous imagination of Algernon was enslaved for ever. In the admirable "Adieux à Marie Stuart," which he wrote at least thirty years later, he said, looking

back to this enchanting day on the banks of the Water of Hermitage :

> There beats no heart on either border
> Wherethrough the north blasts blow
> But keeps your memory as a warder
> His beacon-fire aglow.
>
> Long since it fired with love and wonder
> Mine, for whose April age
> Blithe midsummer made banquet under
> The shade of Hermitage.

The character of Mary, however, offered some of the most puzzling and elusive problems which can attend the attempt to resuscitate any historical figure. There can be no doubt that Swinburne's early reflections upon it were tinctured with a juvenile romanticism which his continued studies obliged him more and more to modify. This, almost beyond question, was the reason of his slow progress, and continued dissatisfaction, with the portrait of her which he now reluctantly published in *Chastelard*, and it is known that in later years he did not consider it to be so successful as those which he afterwards produced in *Bothwell* and in *Mary Stuart*. He was fascinated early by the evidence of her high spirit, her ready wit and her victorious charm, but it was not until he had given prolonged meditation to the documents which have been preserved from that confused and tumultuous age that he clearly perceived the qualities which he summed up at last (in 1882) as her " easiness, gullibility, incurable innocence and invincible ignorance of evil, incapacity to suspect or resent anything,

readiness to believe and forgive all things." Moreover, even in 1865, much was still neglected, much superficially observed, in the records themselves, and Swinburne had had no opportunity of considering the investigations of later students of Mary's reign. The figure of Mary in *Chastelard*, therefore, must be looked upon as a brilliant sketch, marvellously fresh and bright, but superficial in all its principal lines, and marred by the inexperience of the young historian.

The central figure of his drama, moreover, was not so much Mary Stuart as it was the young poet whose infatuation so deeply compromised her, and who expiated his error on the scaffold. So little was he known to the reading public of 1865 that some of the reviewers supposed him to be entirely, or mainly, an invention. But in point of fact, Swinburne kept very closely to the contemporary narratives in his portrait, introducing, as *tesserae* in his mosaic, a great many minute features which may easily escape the notice of a reader. Pierre de Boscozel de Chastelard was as truly a conventional specimen of his age as Mary was an exceptional one. He represented to perfection the Italianated elegance and irresponsible paganism of the French Renaissance as it flourished in the reigns of the later Valois. He was like a personage in some voluptuous and high-flown tragedy of Quinault. Born in Dauphiné in 1540, he was by two years Mary's senior; he wore the romantic halo of being a grandnephew of the Chevalier Bayard, but though without fear, he took no pains to be without reproach. He had been attached, as a page,

to the household of the Montmorencys, and thus obtained entrance to the court of François II., where he met Mary. He became, in the light of those times, a man of "good sword and good literature."

Considerable intimacy seems to have already existed between them when, in 1561, the Queen sailed northward to assume her Scottish throne. Brantôme and Chastelard were prominent members of her escort, and the former records, with admiration, that when the ship arrived at the port of Leith (which they called Petit Lict) in the dark, Chastelard exclaimed that there was no need to light lanterns or flare torches because "les beaux yeux de ceste Reyne sont assez esclairans et bastans pour esclairer de leur beaux feux toute la mer, voire l'embrazer pour un besoing." The whole of Chastelard, the whole of what he represented, is revealed in this feverish, gallant and preposterous exclamation. Sent back to France with the rest of the escort, his presumptuous passion so inflamed the poet that in November 1562 he slipped back to Scotland, and committed those acts of indelicate imprudence which led to his execution on the 21st of February 1563. On the scaffold he carried with him—a characteristic detail which Swinburne omits—Ronsard's poems instead of a testament, and read one of them with ostentation. He murmured "O cruelle Dame! Marie!" as the blow fell. Brantôme adds the delightful comment that Chastelard suffered death "par son outrecuidance et non pour crime." His verses, which seem to have been all addressed,

with naïve effrontery, to the Queen, are lost, except a piece which closes thus :

Ces buissons et ces arbres
Qui sont autour de moy,
Ces rochers et ces marbres
Sçavent bien mon esmoy ;
Bref, rien de la nature
N'ignore la blessure,
Fors seulement
Toy, qui prends nourriture
En mon cruel tourment.

These lines are genuine, but the beautiful lyrics in French, which adorn several scenes of *Chastelard*, and are there attributed to him, are entirely the work of Swinburne. They reproduce the manner of the latest imitators of the Pléiade with extraordinary fidelity, and are among the most amazing *tours-de-force* of Swinburne's assimilative genius. We may doubt whether any of Chastelard's actual verse was of so high a level in poetry as " Le navire est à l'eau," or " J'ai vu faner bien des choses."

Swinburne did not confine himself to Brantôme's account, but consulted *The History of the Reformation in Scotland* (1584) by John Knox, who says that " Amongis the monzeonis of the Court, Monsieur Chattelett " surpassed all others in credit with the Queen. Knox closes his account of the execution by saying, " And so received Chattelett the reward of his dansing, for he lacked his head, that his toung should not utter the secreattis of our Quene." Professor Hume Brown points out to me that Knox deals very gently with the fault of " poor Chattelett,"

doubtless because he was of Huguenot upbringing. His tone about a licentious Papist would have been very different.

The dramatic movement of *Chastelard* and its curious facility of style make it unique in the poetry of the nineteenth century. It has not the weight of *Bothwell* nor the ethical intensity of *Erechtheus*, but as a piece of literature for the study it has the extraordinary merits of speed and lightness. There are no heavy passages, or very few, and it proceeds on its flowery and fatal course without interruption. Of all Swinburne's dramas it is the easiest to read, the most amusing, the most lucid. Nevertheless, it has never been favoured by the critics, nor much appreciated by the public. The reason is probably to be found in its attitude towards life and morals. It is well known that it was objected to from the first on the ground that it was "immoral" in tendency, and this charge was brought against it not in consequence of any coarseness in the language, but because the whole tone of it was out of sympathy with the sentimental conception of love that prevailed in the English literature of its time. The reading public was satisfied with the way in which Tennyson, particularly in the *Idylls of the King*, treated the emotions in the rude stories of a mythical antiquity which he rehearsed, and as it were adapted, for a strictly modern use. His Elaines and Enids were conventional women of the reign of Victoria, travestied against a romantic background of semi-barbarous romance, but preserving all their latter-day prejudices.

Swinburne, on the other hand, having selected for his background the strange mixture of refinement and brutality which characterised Franco-Scottish court-life in the sixteenth century, determined to present his characters as faithfully as he dared, without any concession to sentimentality. We have seen, and shall have occasion to see again, that his imagination was always swinging, like a pendulum, between the north and the south, between Paganism and Puritanism, between resignation to the instincts and an ascetic repudiation of their authority. With him, to an unceasing extent, the influences of childhood were ever present, and he saw existence in terms, now of the grim moors and stern summits of the Cheviot Hills, now of the rich gardens of the Isle of Wight, glimmering southward down to burnished seas of summer. In *Chastelard* a little group of delicate exotic women, rustling in their bright emptiness like so many dragon-flies, are presented to us caged in a world of violent savages and scarcely less acrid ascetics. Swinburne was profoundly read in the pages of Brantôme and Knox, in the amorous novels of the French and the minatory sermons of the Scottish preachers. He was as much at home in the meadows of the Pays du Tendre as in the dark and perilous roads that led away from Holyrood, and was not less familiar with *The Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* than with the divagations of Desportes in *Les Amours d'Hippolyte.*

Having it, therefore, upon his dramatic conscience to present lovers not as seen in Trollope

and Patmore, or even in George Eliot and Browning, but in a condition of entire relaxation to the "precious" ideal of the French sixteenth century, Swinburne created a figure which shocked the British public of 1865, and has been unsympathetic to it since. In *Chastelard*, to use the well-known phrase of Corneille, love is not the "ornament," as it is in most English plays, but the "body" of the tragedy. All relates to it, all else is molten in the breath of it; all sentiments, all responsibilities, all ties of religion and patriotism and duty wither where it blows.

Readers were offended with the hero in Swinburne's third act, because his attitude to life was totally foreign to a generation which had pastured on *The Angel in the House*; but perhaps the most salient lines in the whole play are those in which the infatuated Chastelard says to the Queen, in the act of behaving to her in a manner which we justly regard as abominable and dishonourable:

> No, by God's body;
> You will not see? how shall I make you see?
> Look, it may be love was a sort of curse
> Made for my plague and mixed up with my days
> Somewise in their beginning; or indeed
> A bitter birth begotten of sad stars
> At mine own body's birth, that heaven might make
> My lip taste sharp where other men drank sweet;
> But whether in heavy body or broken soul,
> I know it must go on to be my death.
> There was the matter of my fate in me
> When I was fashioned first, and given such life
> As goes with a sad end; no fault but God's.
> Yea, and for all this I am not penitent.

This was the exact morality of those who

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dwelt in Tendre-sur-Inclination, and worshipped Love as an insatiable Moloch, "a sort of curse made for man's plague." And, as Brantôme says in his wonderful account of Chastelard's execution, which Swinburne must have deeply studied, "c'est la fin de l'histoire."

CHAPTER V

POEMS AND BALLADS

(1866)

THE success of *Chastelard*, following upon the still more brilliant success of *Atalanta*, encouraged Algernon's friends to press for the publication of his miscellaneous lyrics. Not a few among his associates had long believed that, interesting and eloquent as his dramas might be, it was his songs and ballads and odes that really placed him, as they contended, on the very topmost peak of Parnassus. There were remarkable scenes in the early 'sixties; Swinburne in the studio of some painter-friend, quivering with passion as he recited "Itylus" or "Félise" or "Dolores" to a semicircle of worshippers, who were thrilled by the performance to the inmost fibre of their beings. It used to be told that at the close of one such recital the auditors were found to have slipped unconsciously to their knees. The Pre-Raphaelite ladies, in particular, were often excessively moved on these occasions, and once, at least, a crown of laurel, deftly flung by a fair hand, lighted harmoniously upon the effulgent curls of the poet. Rossetti looked askance at these private rites of deification, and was anxious that

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the poems should come forth to brave the battle and the breeze. But neither he nor any one else foresaw how fiercely the breeze would blow, and how long the battle would last.

As we read *Poems and Ballads* to-day, it is difficult to reconstruct the social order into which they intruded like a bomb-shell. So far as could be perceived at the time, the 'sixties formed the most quiescent, the most sedate, perhaps, we might even without offence continue, the least effective and efficient period in our national poetry. That this was only apparent, and that to us, looking back over half a century, it is now seen to be prodigiously effective and active in the forces that were developing, does not militate against what has just been said. The *Dedication of the Idylls of the King* in 1862, *Enoch Arden* and *Aylmer's Field* in 1864, were typical of a certain tendency, encouraged by social prejudice, which was deplorable in its effect upon public taste, however gracefully and even faultlessly exercised by Tennyson himself in certain instances. There is no doubt that the superficiality, the element of conventionality and time-serving which invaded that poet's temperament at this moment—dust to be flung from his wings with admirable vigour at a later period—that this smooth blandness was terribly welcome to the mid-Victorian reading public, and that the favour which Philistia showed to it almost completely silenced every voice that uttered a whisper of revolt.

Tennyson, therefore, the starched and embroidered Tennyson of the *Idylls*, held the field

of poetry all to himself, imperially resigning a corner here or there to a devoted disciple like Jean Ingelow. But over every other poetical voice depression and silence had fallen. Robert Browning, rebuffed and rejected, yet not discouraged, was concentrating himself on the long labour of writing *The Ring and the Book.* Matthew Arnold, though with *Thyrsis* in his portfolio, had long contented himself with prose in his addresses to the public. Philistia seemed to have prevailed; it was the epoch of the crinoline and the pointed shawl, when not merely could a spade never be called a spade in the most restricted circles, but the existence of that or any other such domestic utensil was strenuously denied.

It is violent and unjust to sweep away, as some petulant youthful critics are nowadays apt to do, the value of Tennyson's idyllic work. Take even the baldest portions of it, take the sentimental story of "Dora," and the skill of the verse, the lucidity and directness of the narrative command respect. But the influence of it all was deadening, and we see the unquestioned genius of Tennyson in 1862 acting as a upas tree in English poetry, a wide-spreading and highly popular growth beneath whose branches true imagination withered away. Propriety had prevailed; and, once more to change our image, British poetry had become a beautifully guarded park, in which, over smoothly shaven lawns, where gentle herds of fallow-deer were grazing, thrushes sang very discreetly from the boughs of ancestral trees, and where there

was not a single object to be seen or heard which could offer the very smallest discomfort to the feelings of the most refined mid-Victorian gentlewoman. Into this quiet park, to the infinite alarm of the fallow-deer, a young Bacchus was now preparing to burst, in the company of a troop of Maenads, and to the accompaniment of cymbals and clattering kettle-drums.

At the close of 1865 the position of affairs was this. The Pre-Raphaelites, duly announced by Ruskin fifteen years earlier, had gradually forced themselves upon the acceptance of a limited circle of artists and lovers of art. In the person of Millais, who had something of the character of Tennyson, they had even captured the stronghold of the Royal Academy. But the very titles of the pictures with which Millais was winning the plaudits of the public—in 1865 they were "My Second Sermon" and "Charlie is my Darling"—were enough to show what concessions he was prepared to make. Those who made no concessions—D. G. Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, Whistler, for example—arrived at no visible progress towards popularity, and were misunderstood, ridiculed, and eschewed by the critics. But in poetry it had until quite lately been even worse. Meredith's first attempt in 1851, and his second in 1862, W. Morris's in 1858, Swinburne's own in 1860, D. G. Rossetti's in 1861, had been absolute failures; the new poetry seemed to have achieved no progress in the eye of the public since the experiment of *The Germ* in 1850. Then at last came Christina Rossetti with her brilliant, fantastic, and pro-

foundly original volume of *Goblin Market* in 1862, and achieved the earliest popular success for Pre-Raphaelite poetry. Swinburne never failed to recognise the priority of Christina; he used to call her the Jael who led their host to victory.

But neither in *Goblin Market* nor in *Modern Love* was anything to be found that could be charged with disturbing those proprieties which had now practically slumbered in English literature since the publication of *Don Juan*. Here might be a treatment of versification, of natural scenery, even of character which was unfamiliar and therefore blameworthy, but there was nothing or next to nothing which could mantle the cheek of innocence with a blush. The friends of Algernon Swinburne were amply aware that, so far from avoiding all possibilities of offence in this direction, he was prepared to turn the pudic snows of Mrs. Grundy's countenance to scarlet, and they had observed a certain impish gusto in his anticipation of so doing. He was even impatient to invade the Respectabilities in their woodbine bower, and to make their flesh creep while he did so. In comparison with the crudities and the audacities which are nowadays poured out upon our indifference, the particular mutinies of Swinburne's lyrics may appear to be mild and almost anodyne. But the age was not accustomed to expressions of sensuous or of heterodox opinion. It had never had presented to it, even "on grey paper with blunt type," anything which bore the least resemblance to "Anactoria" or "The Leper."

At the close of 1865, then, Lord Houghton,

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who took the most amiable and enthusiastic interest in the affairs of his young friend, laid himself out to prepare the way for a volume of lyrics. He suggested that the MSS. should be submitted to several people of importance, with reference to the possibility that the poems might create a dangerous scandal. Accordingly the opinions of Ruskin, and perhaps of F. T. Palgrave, to whom Houghton now introduced Swinburne, were invited.

On the 8th of December 1865 Ruskin called at 22 Dorset Street and spent a long evening alone with the poet, who read him "a great part of my forthcoming volume of poems, selected with a view to secure his advice as to publication and the verdict of the world." Ruskin expressed an enthusiastic admiration and approval, and accepted Swinburne's paganism "with frankness." Lady Trevelyan also indicated approval. Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Burton, and Whistler, none of whom could be considered, however, as whole-hearted supporters of Mrs. Grundy, were also gravely consulted.

Swinburne, as might well be supposed, was a little restive under all this examination, and he very properly insisted that censure should confine itself to the plain issue of whether the British public would or would not "stand" such a dish of strong meat. He invited no other criticism, and he wrote to Houghton with a proper dignity: "As to my quantities and metre and rule of rhythm and rhyme, I defy castigation. The head-master has sent me up for good on that score,—Mr. Tennyson tells me in a note that he

'envies me my gift that way.' After this approval, I will not submit myself to the birch on that account."

We have seen that he had been taken in 1858 to dine with Tennyson, who then wrote of him as "a very modest and intelligent young fellow"; and now the Laureate, having read *Atalanta*, remarked, "It is many a long day since I have read anything so fine." In December 1865, when the manuscript of *Poems and Ballads* was being put together, Tennyson came up to London on one of his rare visits, and Palgrave asked Houghton to bring Swinburne to see his illustrious guest. But the visit was not wholly a success; after a few words of civility had passed between the poets, they found nothing more to say to one another. Swinburne withdrew, with G. H. Lewes, to another room, and monologuized in rather falsetto tones about Blake and Flaxman. He was unduly excited, and, in short, he behaved in a way which greatly incensed Houghton, who, while taking him back to his lodgings, administered to him "an avalanche of advice" as to how to behave in presence of his elders and betters, advice which was very angrily resented and led to a temporary cooling of friendship.

This incident was highly characteristic, and may be taken as a type of much which has been repeated and may be repeated again. Swinburne was now becoming unfitted for general society, because the presence of many persons, and particularly of strangers, fretted him, and because he was unable to resist the tide of excitement which considerations of literature and art loosened in his

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being, and which flooded his brain, distracted his voice, and disarticulated his limbs.

It is thought to have been in 1866 that Swinburne became acquainted at the Arts Club with Dr. George Bird, already the intimate friend of the Burtons and the Spartalis. This excellent physician, whose tastes were markedly intellectual and artistic, and who had enjoyed the intimacy of Leigh Hunt in his last years, was an unqualified admirer of *Atalanta in Calydon*. He had a nature, sympathetic and serene, which instantly commended itself to Swinburne, who soon became a constant visitor to him and to his sister, Miss Alice Bird, at their house in Welbeck Street. Algernon's meetings here with Richard Burton have already been mentioned. Dr. Bird became Swinburne's guardian-angel, as well as his doctor, and in the double capacity saved him from many results of his wild impulsiveness. Once, some years later than the point which we have now reached, the poet completely vanished, to the extreme alarm of his family. Admiral Swinburne came up from Holmwood in great agitation, and, helpless to discover the truant, applied to Dr. George Bird and his sister. Alone with Miss Bird for a few moments, the Admiral said, with pathetic solicitude, "Miss Bird, God has endowed my son with genius, but He has not vouchsafed to grant him self-control." On this occasion, and on others of a more or less distressing kind, the prodigal was found and restored to his lodgings by the devotion and cleverness of Dr. Bird, to whom, it is not too much to say, he owed his life not once nor twice.

The little breeze with Houghton, who displayed on these occasions a most amiable patience, soon blew itself out, and the preparations for collecting the lyrics went forward undisturbed. In January 1866 it was decided to make a beginning by issuing, as a test, a small privately printed edition of what was, oddly enough, looked upon by the friends as the most dangerous of the pieces, namely, *Laus Veneris*. Accordingly, Moxon issued a very few copies of this poem as a little book by itself. Of the genesis of this interesting pamphlet, Swinburne gave an account in later years. "It was," he wrote, "more an experiment to ascertain the public taste—and forbearance!—than anything else. Moxon, I well remember, was terribly nervous in those days." The reference is to the firm, since Moxon himself was dead, but his business was continued by a certain J. Bertram Payne, who, no doubt, represented "Moxon" to the poet's consciousness.

In spite, however, of the imprint on *Laus Veneris*, there certainly had been a proposal that the ancient firm of Murray should publish the complete collection, and Lord Houghton, rather prematurely, submitted the manuscript to Albemarle Street. Swinburne was not quite pleased; "I do not," he wrote to Joseph Knight, "overmuch like my poems sent as it were for approval like those of a novice." This anxiety was well grounded, for Mr. Murray at once refused them (March 4), and in terms which stung the poet to fury. He said that he would permit no more interference, and "Moxon" finally

deciding to take it, the thick volume now entitled *Poems and Ballads* was in the hands of the printers by March 1866. On the 19th of April Swinburne was correcting proofs of this and of a prose book on Blake of which he had sent part to press before the close of 1865. If the timidity of publishers should seem to us to-day excessive, let it be recalled that as lately as 1841 Edward Moxon himself had been prosecuted, and heavily fined, for issuing a reprint of Shelley's *Queen Mab*. In the light of subsequent action, we may well believe that the shadow of this conviction still troubled the dreams of his successor.

Meanwhile, still early in 1866, Swinburne published with Moxon a judicious selection from the lyrical work of Byron, and prefixed to it a long critical study. In later years, when his attitude to Byron had become one of pronounced hostility, he disliked any reference to this early essay, which is now little known. It is, however, not merely a sound, clear, and weighty piece of criticism, but is written in a style of unusual purity and restraint. No more faultless passage of prose was ever composed by Swinburne than that with which the *Byron* of 1866 concludes :

> His work was done at Missolonghi ; all of his work for which the fates could spare him time. A little space was allowed him to show at least a heroic purpose, and attest a high design ; then, with all things unfinished before him and behind, he fell asleep after many troubles and triumphs. Few can ever have gone wearier to the grave ; none with less fear. He had done enough to earn his rest. Forgetful now and set free for ever from all faults and foes, he passed through the doorway of no

ignoble death out of reach of time, out of sight of love, out of hearing of hatred, beyond the blame of England and the praise of Greece. In the full strength of spirit and of body his destiny overtook him, and made an end of all his labours. He had seen and borne and achieved more than most men on record. "He was a great man, good at many things, and now he had attained his rest."

Here the cadences are exquisite, and they are proper to the instrument of prose. The *Byron* of 1866 begins with a handsome compliment to Matthew Arnold, but it is probable that to Arnold himself was due Swinburne's later prejudice against Byron, since he bitterly resented Arnold's depreciation of Shelley as a mere satellite of Byron, and so was drawn to meditate upon Byron's shortcomings as a poet and as a man. It was arranged that Moxon should follow the *Selections from Byron* by a similar *Keats* arranged, with a critical preface, by Swinburne; but in the confusion which presently ensued this project was dropped. So also was the scheme of a literary magazine he was to edit.

In the case of a collection of lyrical verse so important as *Poems and Ballads*, it would be interesting to possess some indication of the dates at which the successive pieces were composed. But, so far as our present knowledge goes, this is impossible. We are not able even to conjecture what actuated the poet in the existing arrangement, or rather lack of arrangement, of the poems. He seems to have shuffled them together, like cards in a hat, with an intentional confusion of subject, date, and style. That

they illustrate ten or eleven years of Swinburne's life, years in which he was rapidly developing in intellectual experience and in breadth of expression, this is all that we know, and it is tantalising enough to the biographical critic.

The only light thrown on this darkness is itself obscure, since the lines in the Dedication to Edward Burne-Jones, in which the poet says of his *Poems and Ballads* that

> Some sang to me dreaming in class-time
> And truant in hand as in tongue;
> For the youngest were born of boy's pastime,
> The eldest are young,

are refuted by his own explicit statement, at a later date, that he "burned every scrap of MS. he had in the world" when he was eighteen.[1] But in April 1855—if we may take that as the approximate date of this destruction—he had left school for two years, and the impression that still-existing verses had been written "in class-time" at Eton is almost certainly an error of memory. It may be connected with the strange fact that about 1865 Swinburne contrived to persuade himself, and to convince some of his friends, that he was three years younger than he really was. He cultivated this odd fiction for some time, thereby laying many traps for posterity. On the double supposition, then, that he was born in 1840, and that *Poems and Ballads* covered eleven years, he would be obliged to attribute the earliest of them to his fifteenth year, when he was still at Eton, and when we

[1] "Aholibah" and "Madonna Mia" are understood to be among the earliest of *Poems and Ballads*, written perhaps in 1858.

know that he "got full sense" for his Greek elegiacs. But this was an innocent mystification, and there is no evidence that a single piece in *Poems and Ballads* was "blown with boy's mouth in a reed," especially as we have seen the boy Algernon to have been far from precocious as a poet.

There were frequent attempts made by his friends to unravel the secrets of the volume of 1866, but Swinburne never gave them any help. Stedman undertook by a careful investigation to date the principal poems, and submitted his conjectures to the poet. He received in reply the baffling remark, "Your guess at some among them is quite right, but of course there are more." In 1875, under pressure of this kind, Swinburne announced: "You will soon see the *Poems and Ballads* in a new edition, and all those written at college removed into the same volume with my two early plays, and labelled all together as *Early Poems*"; but he never carried out this scheme, and the interesting secret seems to have died with him.

We know that a great accession of lyrical fervour came upon him in 1862, when "Laus Veneris," and "Faustine," and "The Triumph of Time" were composed. I have examined drafts of the "Ballad of Life" and the "Ballad of Death," which bear the same date, and in that year also several political poems, probably earlier in time of composition, were printed in the *Spectator*. "Hermaphroditus" was written in Paris in March 1863. "Itylus" and "Félise" may, with more or less certainty, be dated 1864. "Dolores" was

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composed at Ashburnham Place, in the late summer of 1865. Swinburne told me that the "Ode to Victor Hugo" was, he believed, written in that year. These are slight but not valueless indications, and it is possible that more and more definite data will in due time be forthcoming.

Meanwhile, Lord Houghton did not pause in his benevolent work of rousing public curiosity. His influence in social and literary circles was very considerable, and he threw himself with zeal into any cause which he took up. The new poet found himself excessively discussed beforehand, and Lord Houghton did not hesitate to add piquancy to his recommendations by hints of the highly-spiced quality of the dish that his young friend was preparing. Perhaps this was a little overdone, and the idle public somewhat too mysteriously warned, with nudge and wink, to look out for something vivid. A certain prejudice, pre-awakened, entered into the causes of the outburst which was to follow.

Meanwhile, on the 2nd of May 1866, Lord Houghton took the chair at the Anniversary Dinner of the Royal Literary Fund, in Willis' Rooms. Here was an occasion for dauntless propaganda, and it was bravely taken. The Chairman bargained that, if he came, he must insist on his youthful and brilliant friend, Mr. Swinburne, being asked to reply for "Literature." The Committee was more than cool, the brilliant and youthful friend absolutely refused, but Lord Houghton was not to be put by. When he wished for something, it was his custom to get it, and on the night of the 2nd of May, not merely was the author of *Atalanta* among

the honoured guests, but Venables, in proposing "the Historical and Imaginative Literature of England," called upon Charles Kingsley and Algernon Swinburne to reply. What Venables said is remarkable, both as indicating the high position that Swinburne had already achieved, and as showing an anxiety lest so spirited a steed might kick over the traces. He remarked:

> The representative of that future generation is, I say without fear or hesitation, Mr. Swinburne. He alone, of his age, has shown his power to succeed in the highest walks of poetry. . . . I have no doubt that in the long career which is probably before him, Mr. Swinburne will take many easier and many pleasanter subjects [than *Chastelard*]. . . . He will hardly exceed the beauty of the lyric flights which he has accomplished; and I am sure that he will feel that as the representative of the future in English poetry he has a great responsibility upon him.

Charles Kingsley endorsed "every word that Mr. Venables had said" in praise of Swinburne, who thereupon rose, in the midst of great curiosity and general acclamation, and recited, in shrill, monotonous tones, the short essay which he had learned by heart. The occasion was a very curious one, for never before, and never again through the whole of his life, was Swinburne to make a public appearance of this kind. He was "single-speech Algernon" in the fullest sense of the phrase.

His reply, preserved in the archives of the Royal Literary Fund, but never republished, is a very curious epitome of his poetical creed. Brief as it was, Swinburne found means to

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enshrine in it his passion for Victor Hugo and his admiration for Baudelaire, and to enunciate, for the first time, that theory of the triplicity of mediaeval imagination which he was so very fond of repeating :

> The Middle Ages brought forth a trinity of great poets : Dante, the Italian noble ; Chaucer, the English gentleman ; Villon, the French plebeian. Chaucer touches Dante with reluctance, almost with repulsion, uses him for a little, then recoils, and drops him as a child might drop a hot iron. But when Chaucer comes upon the poetry of France he feels instantly at home. The spirit of southern France brightens and warms his verse ; the hot, sweet breath of Provence satiates and excites him. He translates, even (in part), the intolerable *Roman de la Rose* ; but the real tribute to France is not there ; it must be sought in his *Court of Love*,[1] impregnated with Provençal fancy, permeated with Albigensian faith ; in his *Troilus and Cresside*, filled from end to end with that fierce monotony of tenderness, that bitter absorption of life, which has made the heathenish love of Provençal fighters and singers a proverb to this day.

As a series of historical statements all this is out of date, but as evidence of the condition of Swinburne's mind in this critical year 1866, it has permanent value. Among those who listened to these feverish outpourings of genius were, it is somewhat amusing to be told, Dean Stanley, Henry Reeve, Anthony Trollope, Sir Samuel Baker, and "the Rev. Leslie Stephen," besides one or two personal friends, such as Frederic Leighton and Lord Milton.

[1] That this poem was not written by Chaucer, not indeed until a century and a half after his death, was not at that time suspected.

With this evening's work, the labour of preparing for the reception of *Poems and Ballads* was complete. The banquet was ready, the company assembled, but the principal guest failed to arrive. The volume had been announced to appear early in May; by the middle of July it had still not made its appearance. All the reasons for this delay are not quite defined, but it seems that an early copy of the bound volume being sent to the author in May, he immediately detected in it between twenty and thirty serious misprints, which had escaped him in the revise. How it had been possible for Swinburne to overlook so large a number of faults in his proofs it is not easy to conjecture, but the fact is certain. He returned the copy to Moxon forthwith, insisting that the errors might all be rectified as completely as possible. This involved a great deal of expense and delay. Mr. T. J. Wise, who discovered this fact, and who has carefully compared the original corrections in the poet's handwriting with the final text, tells me that "to effect this revision some of the sheets had to be reprinted *in toto*; in certain cases portions only of the sheets were reprinted; in other instances, where punctuation only was involved, the missing stops were inserted by hand." At any rate, it was an exasperating business, which delayed the final appearance of the book until late in the summer.

Algernon now experienced a loss which was, as Sir George Otto Trevelyan remarked to me in a letter which I print entire in an Appendix, "a very real and permanent misfortune to him." Pauline, Lady Trevelyan, though still in middle

life, had for some years been failing in health. Swinburne had submitted his poems to her as he wrote them, and it is believed that she was able to read some of the proofs of *Poems and Ballads*. She left England in a vain pursuit of recovery, and died at Neuchâtel in Switzerland on the 13th of May 1866. Her influence over Swinburne, who called her his "second mother," had been uniformly sympathetic and wholesome, and during her lifetime the fear of grieving her was a constant check upon his extravagances. On occasion, Lady Trevelyan, whose social authority among people of various high distinction was great, exercised it practically in the defence of the young poet, whose character was, in some quarters, bitterly aspersed; and he was deeply and continuously grateful to her. In after years he never spoke of Lady Trevelyan without emotion.

On receiving his copy of *Poems and Ballads*, Richard Burton expressed his fear that the British public might be unwilling to swallow so much undiluted paganism. But no one had anticipated the storm of censure which now broke over Algernon's radiant and mocking head. He might, however, have defied the common reviewer, since he had not a few supporters in the press, with Joseph Knight prominent among them. But an antagonist arose whose authority could not be disregarded, and whose ferocity was terrible. By far the most powerful organ of literary opinion in 1866 was the *Saturday Review*, in which, on the 4th of August, appeared a very long article entitled "Mr. Swinburne's New

Poems," an article that not merely transformed the fortunes of that particular edition or volume, but created a prejudiced conception of the poet from which it is not too much to say that he suffered until the end of his life.

This review, which was brilliantly written, came from the pen of an Oxford man, afterwards not less famous than Swinburne himself, who had been for years at the University with him, but had never happened to meet him. By the odd fate of things, the writer later on became one of Swinburne's closest friends and supporters, although he never distinctly withdrew from the position he had taken up in censuring the "libidinous songs" of 1866. It was in this review, which was a nine-days' wonder in the world of letters, that strong publicity was first given to several phrases—such as "The lilies and languors of virtue, the roses and raptures of vice," or "Thou art noble and nude and antique,"—which immediately became hack-lines and the prey of parodists. A quotation from this very powerful and mordant review may be given as the model of what was from this time forward to be alleged by Swinburne's opponents:

> Mr. Swinburne riots in the profusion of colour of the most garish and heated kind. He is like a composer who should fill his orchestra with trumpets, or a painter who should exclude every colour but a blaring red and a green as of sour fruit. There are not twenty stanzas in the whole book which have the faintest tincture of soberness. We are in the midst of fire and serpents, wine and ashes, blood and foam, and a hundred lurid horrors. Unsparing use of the most violent colours and the most

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intoxicated ideas and images is Mr. Swinburne's prime characteristic.

But the moral charges were far severer than the literary. The poet was called "an unclean fiery imp from the pit" and "the libidinous laureate of a pack of satyrs." He was accused of an "audacious counterfeiting of strong and noble passion by mad intoxicated sensuality." He had "revealed to the world a mind all aflame with the feverish carnality of a schoolboy over the dirtiest passages in Lemprière." All this and more, in the columns of the leading literary newspaper of the age, formed a loud and clear call for conclusive public reprobation.

The next week was the most agitating in Algernon's life. As it happened, the *Saturday Review* had condemned the book before it was obtainable in the shops, the copy on which it based its attack having been delivered for criticism in advance of the regular publication. The note struck by the *Saturday Review* was immediately repeated, in more or less virulence and panic, by other newspapers. A report was spread abroad that the *Times* was preparing an attack on the book, which would include a demand for the criminal prosecution of the publisher. Payne had not hesitated, but on the 5th of August had curtly informed Swinburne that *Poems and Ballads* was withdrawn from sale. He did this, as Swinburne complained, "without consulting, without warning and without compensation," a victim to sudden and craven panic. Swinburne was constitutionally unable to attend to business which required patience and self-

restraint, and D. G. Rossetti and his brother, Mr. W. M. Rossetti, took up the matter for him. They called at the house of Moxon, in Dover Street, and saw Bertram Payne, who treated them with scant respect. They reported on their return that the publisher was distracted with terror of the Public Prosecutor, and desired nothing so much as to be rid of the poet and all his friends.

On the other hand, Swinburne received warm support and sympathy from many sources, and several of them unexpected. George Meredith wrote to him not to care, although this was "decidedly the Era of the Tame Ox." Lord Lytton, who had been an early admirer of *Atalanta*, wrote to him at once in most consolatory tones, and offered his practical help. Swinburne went down to Knebworth, whither Forster was asked to meet him, and he stayed there for nearly a week. Meanwhile, Lord Lytton looked into his affairs, and arranged, through Joseph Knight, for the republication of *Poems and Ballads* by a firm more courageous than Moxon's. Lytton described the poet, who was then in his thirtieth year, as one who looked sixteen, "a pale, sickly boy"; "he inspires one with sadness; but he is not so sad himself, and his self-esteem is solid as a rock." With regard to the supposed immoral horrors of the poems, Lytton confessed himself with naiveté: "the beauty of diction and mastership of craft in melodies really so dazzled me that I did not see the naughtiness till pointed out."

Lord Houghton, away for his health at Vichy, was inclined to underestimate the fury of the

newspapers, but recommended reliance on the wisdom and experience of Lord Lytton. Accordingly, Swinburne removed all his publications from Messrs. Moxon, and also, as has only lately become known, withdrew the sheets of the practically complete monograph of *William Blake*, which were stored in that arrested condition till they were brought out two years later by John Camden Hotten, that somewhat notorious tradesman being now the only one who would take the risk of bringing out the works of a poet who had publicly been stigmatised for immorality.

Swinburne, though advised by Lord Houghton, had been very unwilling to put any work of his, "anonymous or pseudonymous or signed, into the hands of Hotten," but beggars cannot be choosers, and he had to face the alternative of being crushed into complete obscurity or illuminated by that somewhat dingy imprint. For the existing copies of *Poems and Ballads* Hotten paid Moxon £200. In September all Swinburne's books, with fresh title-pages and bindings, reappeared under this new sign, and once more the demand for prosecution was uttered. The cry was led, or so at least Swinburne believed, by the social reformer J. M. Ludlow (1821–1911), who appears at the same time to have called Victor Hugo a "quack." Swinburne poured forth a string of amusing verse-invectives against Ludlow, but as they were not fitted for publication it is to be feared that the zealous friend of Kingsley and Maurice never saw them. Ludlow demanded the prosecution of *Poems and Ballads*, but there was no longer any ardent response, and an

especial appeal to Ruskin to lead the popular clamour was received in terms which must have disconcerted the objectors. Although, as Sir E. T. Cook slyly remarks, Ruskin "was not usually averse from reading moral lectures," he refused to do it on this occasion. He replied:

> [Swinburne] is infinitely above me in all knowledge and power, and I should no more think of advising him or criticising him than of venturing to do it to Turner if he were alive again. . . . He is simply one of the mightiest scholars of his age in Europe. . . . In power of imagination and understanding he simply sweeps me away before him as a torrent does a pebble. I'm *righter* than he is—so are the lambs and the swallows, but they're not his match.

This was generous and effective, but it is impossible to forget that an appeal had been made beforehand to Ruskin with regard to the propriety of publishing *Poems and Ballads*, and that he had professed to see no cause of offence. He was therefore bound in honour to support the culprit, although we may conjecture that he had not studied "Anactoria" or "Dolores" with any very close attention.

When agreeing to reissue *Poems and Ballads*, Hotten, who was an astute purveyor, made verbal terms which afterwards proved very awkward. He published, in a very small edition, in paper covers, *Cleopatra*, which was new, and has never been reprinted, George Meredith having condemned it as "a farrago of the most obvious commonplaces of 'Swinburne's ordinary style.'" Hotten also suggested and even urged that the poet should accompany the republication of

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Poems and Ballads by a prose apology or defence. Other friends—Rossetti, Ruskin, and Joseph Knight in particular—thought the suggestion a good one, and urged Swinburne to accede to Hotten's request. At first he was unwilling, in the extravagance of wounded pride, to take the slightest notice of his assailants. "Their verdict," he wrote, "to me is a matter of infinite indifference; it is of equally small moment to me whether in such eyes as theirs I appear moral or immoral, Christian or pagan." But he gave way on the reflection "that science must not scorn to investigate animalcules and infusoria," and he consented "for once to play the anatomist."

The early weeks of September 1866 were occupied with the composition of *Notes on Poems and Reviews*. This is the earliest, and on the whole the freshest and most vivacious, of Swinburne's controversial writings. It is not in any sense an apology; there is much more of the red flag than the white sheet about it. It is the protest of a very angry and arrogant young man against what he considers to be at once an injustice and an impertinence. The attitude is sublime in its defiance, and might at a touch become ridiculous. It is saved from that anti-climax by a deft adroitness, and by the remarkable purity of the style. Swinburne was writing prose extremely well when he composed his amusing *Notes on Poems and Reviews*.

It is notoriously difficult to reply with grace to a charge of indelicacy, which, in our chilly climate, is equivalent to a charge of want of good sense and good manners. The victim may bow

the head, like Dryden, or attack the plaintiff's attorney, like Byron; Swinburne adopted an attitude which more closely resembled that of Congreve under the lash of Jeremy Collier. He denied the truth of his critics' animadversions, questioned their good faith, and lavished contempt on their pretensions to purity, learning, and taste. He said that he was not "virtuous" enough to know what the reviewers meant, nor "vicious" enough to explain or imagine. "Ma corruption," he amusingly quoted, "rougirait de leur pudeur." The only fault he recognised in himself was that he had underrated "the evidence which every day makes clearer, that our time has room only for such as are content to write for children and girls." This was the strength of his position, and the point at which his pamphlet did most service to literature. Swinburne's analysis of particular lyrics, his elaborate irony and appeal to French authorities which were already becoming obscure, his loftiness, his bursts of coloured rhetoric—these are merely more or less entertaining. But his passionate appeal for a reasonable and manly liberty of utterance, his indignation at the idea that nothing must be published which is not "fit and necessary food for female infancy"—this struck a new note, or revived a forgotten note, of wholesome freedom, and permanently strengthened the hands of all those who "profess to deal neither in poison nor in pap."

The *Notes* were written at Holmwood, close to Henley-on-Thames, where Algernon's parents were now settled. Later in August he paid Lord

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Houghton a visit at Fryston, and the greater part of September he spent at Penllwyn, near Aberystwyth, with a young Welsh squire, whose acquaintance he had made towards the close of the preceding year, but with whom he now became intimate. This was George Powell of Nant-Eôs, who continued to be for several years Swinburne's close companion and confidant. The poet bathed in the sea, climbed the downs, and raced on horseback along the sands, recovering in the open air, as he always magically did, the youth and splendour of which London so fatally robbed him. He was particularly happy at Aberystwyth this September, gazing over the bay of Cardigan to the tender west, "where," as he wrote, "the shadows of all happy and holy things live beyond the sunset a sacred and a sleepless life," at peace with nature and himself after the fierce and fiery controversies of the summer.

There is no question that the riotous notoriety given to *Poems and Ballads* had a disturbing influence on Swinburne's temperament. It made him exacting and self-conscious. Up to this time he had lived the life of a wonderful child, depending, with great simplicity, on the affection of a narrow circle of friends, who were far too strongly devoted to him to allow his irresponsible moods to worry them. But now he was thrown, with a sudden immense publicity, on the world in general, and exposed to the flatteries and the insults of a crowd of strangers. A legend sprang up about him, and the wildest stories passed from mouth to mouth, and even found expression in the press. He became irritable under what

he held to be injustice, although indeed he had courted a sensation. In this juncture he looked for help from his friends, but several of those on whom he most depended were absent. Lady Trevelyan was dead. Whistler, Burton, and Leighton were out of England. The Rossettis, the Burne-Joneses, and George Howard (afterwards Lord Carlisle), indeed, were loyal and helpful, but Swinburne fell into the hands of other and later associates, whose company was not always of advantage to him.

In particular, about this time, he became involved, like Rossetti and Ruskin, in the ambitions of the strange young Anglo-Portuguese, Charles Augustus Howell, who became his man of business, the partner of his amusements, the confidant of his literary projects, and often his main channel of communication with the world. For seven or eight years, until the arrival of Theodore Watts on the scene, Howell was to Swinburne all that Atticus was to Cicero. From a material point of view it is not clear that Swinburne suffered as D. G. Rossetti, Burne-Jones, and Ruskin are said to have done from the vagaries of Howell, but a worse factotum could scarcely have been found for Swinburne in these critical and fervid years.

No relationship of this early period has been so little understood as that with Whistler, which now underwent an unhappy modification. Swinburne and Whistler had, for three or four years, lived in an intimacy which was of much advantage to the poet, who found in the extraordinary painter a companion as hyperaesthetic as himself, and yet not hurtful to him. Their mutual

peculiarities of character did not clash, and an artistic sympathy of great warmth, and disturbed by no jealousy, united them. No piece in the *Poems and Ballads* was more discussed than "Before the Mirror," an ode of ardent admiration for Whistler's noblest picture, now known as "The Little White Girl." Whistler had been attacked in 1865 as outrageously as Swinburne was in 1866, and the publication of this poem was an act of signal intellectual courage. But when his own turn came Swinburne received no comfort from Whistler. The reason was that Whistler spent almost the whole of 1866 at Valparaiso, and probably knew nothing of what was going on in England. But Swinburne thought that he ought to have written to him from Chile, and he resented the painter's silence. He did not go near Whistler's mother, that admirable woman to whom Swinburne owed so much, and when Whistler reappeared in London, and settled at 96 Cheyne Walk in February 1867, Swinburne was cross, and held aloof. This coldness continued, although courteous relations were afterwards resumed; and the two remained on fair terms until the deplorable quarrel in 1888.

These are private considerations; in the public view, Algernon Swinburne in the winter of 1866 was simply the young man of almost fabulous genius, who had produced a sensation among lovers of poetry such as had not been approached since the youth of Tennyson. As an eminent critic, then an undergraduate at Oxford, has said, "It simply swept us off our legs with rapture." At Cambridge the young

men joined hands and marched along shouting "Dolores" or "A Song in time of Revolution." The volume was mixed up with other fire-crackers in the preparation for the Fifth of November. It stood for passion and flame and revolt, it raced beside the swiftest of its admirers and easily beat them. As Mr. Saintsbury, himself an ardent youth in those days, outside any circle of personal relations with the poet, has recorded, "all the metaphors and similes of water, light, wind, fire, all the modes of motion" seemed to inspire and animate this wonderful poetry, which took the whole lettered youth of England by storm with its audacity and melody.

During the month of October *Notes on Poems and Reviews*, "my defensive and offensive Laus Diabolo," was published, and was received with considerable favour. It was seen through the press by Mr. W. M. Rossetti, who, by excision of several of the most unguarded passages, curbed the noble indignation of the poet. The *Notes* were on the whole favourably received. Even the *Saturday Review* executed a more or less respectful recantation. About the same time a small volume of criticism of Swinburne's poetry was published by Mr. W. M. Rossetti; this was excellent in tone and laudatory without partiality or exaggeration. Meanwhile, the notoriety of *Poems and Ballads* showed no sign of diminution, and it was at this time that George Augustus Sala, called upon at a public dinner to give thanks for poetry, replied that he did so "in the names of the clever (but I cannot say moral) Mr. Swinburne, and of the moral

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(but I cannot say clever) Mr. Tupper." The United States caught the infection, and Swinburne wrote to a friend (Nov. 21, 1866): "I have gone through five editions in as many days in America; a sterile success which brings much clamour and no profit with it." His American publisher, G. W. Carleton, made a spirited fight, but had, he complained, "a rough time of it." He bowed before the storm and withdrew the book, neglecting, so the poet asserted, to pay him any royalties, although the price of single copies went up to five dollars.

On the other hand, there were rapturous admirers everywhere, and "a lady in Florence has written a poem about me and my critics, in which it is stated that the seven leading angels of heaven are now occupied in singing my praises before God, and returning thanks to him for my existence. This is cheerful to know." Lord Houghton defended his young friend in the *Examiner*, under the signature, "Nothing if not critical," and Professor Henry Morley was another apologist. In the shelter of Holmwood the poet settled down to an active winter. He was now studying with warm appreciation the writings of Whitman; he wrote to Houghton (Nov. 2, 1866): "If you have read the *Drum Taps* of the great Walt (whose friends have published a pamphlet in *his* defence), I daresay you agree with me that his dirge or nocturn over your friend Lincoln is a superb piece of music and colour. It is infinitely impressive when read aloud." He reflected upon Walt Whitman while writing the last chapters

Algernon Charles Swinburne
from a drawing by Simeon Solomon
in the Fitzwilliam Museum

Emery Walker ph

of his *William Blake, a critical Essay*, which he completed in November 1866, although it was delayed in publication till 1868. In the same month he began the *Song of Italy*, which he thus announced in a letter of November 29th :

> I have been doing more verses on Italia (excuse—I can't spell it Englishwise)—which some people think as good at least as my best things. Of course as a fanatic I can't judge ; it looks to me simply flat and inadequate ; but I think the verses are good *for me*, however bad they may be for her (I mean *it*).

A brief return to London not merely brought all this creative activity to an end, but violently affected his health. He seemed unable to resist succumbing to the most debilitating irregularities. His family insisted on his hurrying back to Holmwood, where he quickly recovered, and presently resumed the *Song of Italy*, which he completed in February 1867. The winter passed peacefully at Holmwood, where, as " poetry is at a discount and music idolised," the unfortunate Algernon professed himself subjected to a double torture. For music he had no gift nor appreciation. Not to put too fine a point upon it, he was totally devoid of " ear," and to listen to a performance on any instrument drove him wild with petulance and impatience. At Holmwood poetry was not delighted in, and the piano was triumphant. But this was a crease in the rose-leaf, and, in matter of fact, he was profoundly happy and serene at home.

CHAPTER VI

SONGS OF THE REPUBLIC

1867–1870

Chapter VI. 1867

When 1867 opened Swinburne was still in a self-conscious state of upheaval, still, as he put it, "the centre of such a moral chaos that even our excellent Houghton maintains a discreet and consistent neutrality." His late publishers pretended ignorance of his address, and dismissed all his correspondence to the Dead Letter Office. This and other impertinences produced in him a sort of reckless dejection. He had braved public opinion, and now he shrank from an obloquy which he had courted, and the extent of which he exaggerated. Yet he had no intention of pacifying his enemies; he even planned a more determined attack on their susceptibilities. On the 11th of January he wrote to Burton, who was now consul at Santos in Brazil:

I have in hand a scheme of mixed verse and prose,[1]—a sort of étude à la Balzac *plus* the poetry—which I flatter

[1] Swinburne carried out this scheme in a disjointed romance called, from the name of its heroine, *Lesbia Brandon*. After keeping it for nearly ten years in MS., he had it set up in type in 1877. The original MS. is lost, but a single galley-proof, lacking both the beginning and the end, was kept by Mr. Andrew Chatto, and is now in Mr. T. J. Wise's collection. In his opinion and mine this mélange of prose and verse, which Swinburne thought he had completely suppressed, ought never to be published.

myself will be more offensive and objectionable to Britannia than anything I have yet done. You see I have now a character to keep up.

His opening work in 1867, however, was the completion of a long "Ode on the Insurrection in Candia," which he had begun at Aberystwith. This is the earliest poem in which we detect the transcendental tone that was to fill the volume of *Songs before Sunrise*. It is a fine performance, learnedly constructed, but it is a little dull, and in later years the poet disliked to hear it mentioned. He was conscious, I think, of a slight insincerity in the enthusiasm it expressed, for though he was very deeply concerned for Mentana and Custozza, he did not really care whether the Candians insurrected or not. The ode was a false start in the race for Italy, and it was at this precise awkward moment that it occurred to the Master of Balliol, Dr. Jowett, who had never ceased to follow Swinburne's career with interest, that his intellectual high spirits might be utilised and his thoughts led away from Cotytto and Astarte by concentrating his energies on the Republican movement in Italy. This movement was then vitalised in England by the presence amongst us of the devoted and inspiring Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–72), who, having left Italy under sentence of death, had now been long resident in London.

Swinburne's political aspirations, and his occasional political poems, had been increasingly in sympathy with the Republic which Mazzini designed, but he was still unacquainted with the great leader in whose honour he had

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written an ode ten years before. Certain friends now met at the house of George Howard, whither Jowett came, and Mazzini, brought by Karl Blind, to discuss, as Lord Carlisle afterwards put it, "what could be done *with* and *for* Algernon." Accordingly Mazzini, informed of the promise and situation of the tempestuous young poet, consented to take intellectual charge of him. He was shown the "Ode on the Insurrection in Candia," and he wrote a letter to Swinburne (in March 1867), in which he expressed his admiration of the spirit and form of it. Swinburne, never suspecting collusion, took this letter round to show his friends as a heaven-sent missive from the blue. Karl Blind was then instructed to bring Swinburne to Mazzini's lodgings. He did so, with the help of Thomas Purnell, and the result is described in a letter the next morning:

> I unworthy spent much of last night sitting at my beloved Chief's feet. He was angelically good to me. I read him my Italian poem all through and he accepted it in words I can't trust myself to try and write down. . . . To-day I am rather exhausted and out of sorts. Il y a bien de quoi. There's a tradition in the Talmud that when Moses came down from Sinai he was drunken with the kisses of the lips of God.

It is conceivable that Mazzini also was rather exhausted next day, for *A Song of Italy* contains nearly one thousand verses. Swinburne dashed off a dedication, "with all devotion and reverence, to Joseph Mazzini," and sent the little volume to press.

In the meantime, in April of this year, on a

false report in some French newspaper of the death of Baudelaire, Swinburne wrote the most highly-finished of all his elegiacal poems, the "Ave atque Vale." "I have written" (May 23rd) "a little sort of lyric dirge for my poor Baudelaire," he modestly put it. Modelled, like most great English elegies, on the *Lament for Bion* of Moschus, this grave and stately threnody has a soberness, a dignity, which distinguish it among the fervid writings of its author. Nowhere else has Swinburne come nearer to the majesty and depth of emotion of the purest Greek literature, nor clothed his thought in severer language :

> Thou art far too far for wings of words to follow,
> Far too far off for thought or any prayer.
> What ails us with thee, who art wind and air ?
> What ails us gazing when all seen is hollow ?
> Yet with some fancy, yet with some desire,
> Dreams pursue death as winds a flying fire,
> Our dreams pursue our dead and do not find.
> Still, and more swift than they, the thin flame flies,
> The low light fails us in elusive skies,
> Still the foiled earnest ear is deaf, and blind
> Are still the eluded eyes.

In such a stanza as this, as in that which celebrates Sappho, and in the marvellous passage where the poet compares himself with Orestes, we have solemn English poetry produced with the highest possible distinction. Swinburne modestly wrote (in this very year, 1867) : "There are in the English language three elegiac poems so great that they eclipse and efface all the elegiac poetry we know, all of Italian, all of Greek." He meant *Lycidas* and *Adonais* and *Thyrsis*, but we make them four, and include "Ave atque

Vale." The further history of this latter is curious; Baudelaire came to life again, and Swinburne was on the point of tearing up his elegy. However, Baudelaire died some months later, and, after a delay of eleven years, "Ave atque Vale" was at length included in the volume of 1878.

Joseph Knight had by this time introduced the poet to Mr. John Morley (now Viscount Morley of Blackburn), who had just achieved a distinguished success with his first book, *Edmund Burke*, and who was then editing the *Fortnightly Review*. Swinburne was very anxious to find some channel through which to pour the convictions and expose the erudition which he had formed in the intense intellectual labour of the last eight years. He had long fretted at his inability to discover an editor for his critical prose. Morley opened the pages of his review to this brilliant and audacious admirer of all beautiful things, and Swinburne's articles in the *Fortnightly* became a very remarkable element in current literature. It is not too much to say that in them he invented a new class of writing, new at least in England, since there had been in France since 1850 a romantic criticism of high importance. Swinburne owed little or nothing to Sainte-Beuve, whom he never appreciated, but he was strongly affected by the pictorial manner of Gautier, and he had an elder brother after his own heart in Paul de Saint-Victor. Like the studies of the latter, Swinburne's early monographs are impetuous and inflamed impressions of literature which has

either filled the critic with transports of admiration, or, on rarer occasions, with equally violent transports of anger and scorn. For the first time in English literature, an attempt was here made to produce a concrete and almost plastic conception of the work of an author, not minutely analysed or coldly condensed, but presented as if by an inspired neophyte, proclaiming a religion in an ecstasy. Such, in 1867, were the "William Morris" and the "Matthew Arnold" of Swinburne, and the sensation they caused was reverberant. To all young æstheticians of that and the next few years, the advent of the *Fortnightly Review* with a critical article by Swinburne in it was looked forward to as to a great event.

In the summer he was "in the honourable agonies of portrait-sitting—to Watts." This was the picture now in the National Portrait Gallery. The gratified model wrote (May 23, 1867):

> Of course it is a great honour for me to be asked to sit to him, now especially that he accepts no commissions and paints portraits only for three reasons,—friendship, beauty and celebrity; having the "world" at his feet begging to be painted. But it takes time and trouble, and he won't let me crop my hair, whose curls the British public (unlike Titian's) reviles aloud in the streets. *Il faut souffrir pour être—peint*, but the portrait is a superb picture already, in spite of the model, and up to the Venetian standard, by the admission of other artists,—a more than fair test.

He spent an unusually long time in London this year, with more than the customary ill effect

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upon his health. Several recurrences of his nervous malady should have warned him of the danger, but he continued to live at highest pressure, in a round of intellectual fervour relieved only by "racketing." At length, on the 13th of July 1867, when at breakfast with a large party at Lord Houghton's town-house, Swinburne was attacked by a seizure much more violent than he had ever suffered from before. Admiral Swinburne was telegraphed to, and came up to town, bringing with him the family physician, Dr. Alison; they found Algernon already conscious, under the care of a specialist whom Lord Houghton had called in. He was removed at once to his chambers, and next day had recovered enough to be taken down to Holmwood. The prospect seemed dark, but the poet revived as soon as he got home. A fortnight later he was quite well again. The Admiral wrote to Lord Houghton (July 28), "Algernon has fallen willingly into regular hours and habits, as he always does when he is with us. He is tractable and willing to do everything that is required of him. It cannot be expected, and therefore is not insisted upon, that his mental faculties should lie fallow, but we do all we can to keep them tranquil. We feel him to be safe while he is here."

A fortnight later still (Aug. 13), Swinburne writes, in fully-regained high spirits: "My last attack was, they say, of a really dangerous kind, and I am prescribed a *torpor* of mind and body for months." The remainder of this letter shows no trace of mental "torpor." "My Mother is very urgent with me not to move or make the least change

in my habits." This means that while the Admiral was of opinion that Algernon ought to break with London altogether, and live at home, Lady Jane had yielded to Algernon's vehement persuasions, and thought that, under promise of complete reform, he might still keep on his lodgings in town. So ended the most serious of all Swinburne's attacks, and the one which gave the most poignant alarm. It was very curious that, even in this extreme instance, as soon as he came out of his long death-like trance, he felt neither pain nor sickness, although for some days he was feeble and languid.

Swinburne now settled quietly at Holmwood for a period of several months, calm, cheerful, and active. A pleasant and friendly neighbour was Sir Robert Phillimore (1810–1885), the eminent jurist. Ultimately the doctor gave permission for Swinburne to share the lodgings of a friend, on a pledge of being "as regular" there as at home. The "lodgings" were apartments taken by George Powell in a small house in Étretat, in Normandy, where the friends were visited two or three times by Mr. Lindo Myers, who was then living at Havre in connection with the Maritime Exhibition held there in 1867.

On one occasion Mr. Myers spent several days with the friends at Étretat, and Swinburne then showed him some proofs of the poems which Miss Adah Isaacs Menken (1835–1868) published early in 1868 under the title of *Infelicia*. Swinburne had recently made the acquaintance in London of this actress, famous for her performance of "Mazeppa." Swinburne told Mr. Myers that

Adah Menken had sent the poems to him from Paris to look over, and that "not only had he done that, but thought he had improved some of the lines considerably." This settles the absurd legend which was long circulated in Grub Street that *Infelicia* was really written by Swinburne, from whom, without acknowledgment, is borrowed the quatrain:

> Leaves pallid and sombre and ruddy,
> Dead fruits of the fugitive years;
> Some stained as with wine and made bloody,
> And some as with tears.

On the 28th of September, Swinburne returned to England, travelling by the midnight boat from Havre to Southampton, in company with Mr. Lindo Myers, who has given me a very diverting account of the voyage.

Swinburne went back immediately to Holmwood. Then followed a time of serene and wholesome activity, during which Swinburne read the poetry of two dead and three living languages with thirsty zeal, prepared under Mazzini's guidance for his celebration of the Republic, and sketched out, and even began, the majestic series of political poems which was to engage the best of his attention for the next three years. In the autumn of this year was published *A Song of Italy*, loudly heralded by Hotten as a new masterpiece by the author of *Poems and Ballads*, and rashly issued in a first edition of some 3000 copies. Its reception by the public was disappointing. Readers, who had hoped for a wilder "Faustine" or a more abandoned "Dolores," refused to buy this verbose

manifesto of Italian republicanism; thirty years afterwards the original edition was not yet exhausted. It was made the excuse for an outrageously violent attack in the *Saturday Review* on Swinburne's poetry in general, by a Catholic journalist named H. N. Oxenham, who was driven to frenzy by what he called the "fanatical paradox" of the poet's republicanism.

Even the best admirers of Swinburne were somewhat disconcerted by *A Song of Italy*, in spite of the magic of the versification and the dignity and rapture of the language. He had chosen a metre used, and perhaps invented, by Landor, a truncated couplet which is appropriate to a short lyric, but which becomes intolerably fatiguing in a work of nearly seventy pages. Moreover, the whole composition was vociferous and yet vague, while a fault, which had been observed before as waylaying Swinburne's feet, was here found to have completely ensnared him, namely, the temptation to go on and on at the free will of his rhetoric in no particular direction. *A Song of Italy*, written before Mazzini had undertaken the English bard's political education, is amorphous and sometimes scarcely intelligible; in point of lucidity it compares unfavourably with the noble pieces—odes, clarion-cries and what not—which Swinburne was presently to roll out in greeting of the republican sunrise. The principal charm of *A Song of Italy* now resides in its exquisite vignettes of little Tuscan towns that the author had seen four years before during his brief Italian journey, such as this of San Gimignano:

Thou too, O little laurelled town of towers,
Clothed with the flame of flowers,
From windy ramparts girdled with young gold,
From thy sweet hill-side fold
Of wallflowers, and the acacia's belted bloom
And every blowing plume.

The whole of the long ode or rhapsody might really be condensed into this charge to Italia :

O mystic rose ingrained with blood, impearled
With tears of all the world !
The torpor of their blind brute-ridden trance
Kills England and chills France ;
And Spain sobs hard through strangling blood ; and snows
Hide the huge eastern woes.
But thou, twin-born with morning, nursed of noon,
And blessed of sun and moon !
What shall avail to assail thee any more,
From sacred shore to shore ?

The British public, still dominated, in those Podsnapian days, with an equal respect for kings and scorn for foreigners, failed to perceive the point, and it was even less attracted by a pamphlet of verse, an *Appeal to England* against the execution of the Manchester Fenians, which Swinburne circulated late in 1867. This, however, is a political poem of great merit, direct, intelligible, and brief, written in language of high simplicity. The *Appeal*, which is rather to England for mercy than in commendation of the condemned Fenians in particular, is remarkable because Swinburne never repeated his defence of Ireland or hinted again at an Irish republic ; and also because it has a very fine passage in celebration of the United States, a country otherwise scarcely mentioned in all the poet's writings.

The *Appeal* scandalised the reviewers, but it had one interesting result. The Reform League, then a body of some influence, solicited the poet to enter Parliament, offering to ensure his seat and pay his expenses. They took this step on the ground that Swinburne was representative of more advanced or republican opinions than any member of the existing House of Commons. The poet, excessively gratified, but conscious that never in his life had he "felt any ambition for any work or fame but a poet's, except, indeed, while yet a boy, for a soldier's," very wisely applied to Mazzini for advice. The Italian patriot at once instructed him to refuse the invitation; telling him that he had other service to do. Swinburne was greatly relieved when he found he could dismiss the application with a wholly clear conscience, and thus ended his one and only episode on the brink of public affairs. One cannot imagine him in the House of Commons; he would have been a portent of ineffectuality in a place where even John Stuart Mill was little better than a failure.

A little puzzle of bibliography must here be noted. An examination of the original MSS. of the *Dirae* in Mr. Wise's possession shows that these sonnets were not written at one time, but at two different periods, separated by several years. When Swinburne published the whole series, the four terrific sonnets called "Intercession,"—

> O Death, a little more, and then the worm,—

praying for lingering torments to consume the

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miserable Louis Napoleon, were dated "Paris: September 1869." It is apparent, however, that they were written earlier, for in a letter of February 5, 1868, writing from Holmwood, Swinburne says:

> I have had a very jolly note from Victor Hugo. . . . The Master approves highly of my sonnets of intercession for "our mutual friend" [Napoleon III.], calling them "strophes magnifiques."

It seems that he must have sent to Hugo, who was in Guernsey, the manuscript of those sonnets, or an early draft of one or more of them, early in 1868, although he did not completely revise the set until eighteen months later. Unfortunately "Intercession" is missing from among Mr. Wise's MSS.

Throughout the early months of 1868, he was wholly absorbed in writing what was eventually to be collected as *Songs before Sunrise*. In April he wrote "Tiresias"; in June he published "Siena." The magnificent "Prologue" to the volume of 1871 clearly betrays what was passing through his mind in this period of rapturous creative energy. We can hardly question that it was now, at the opening of his thirty-second year, that he felt most ecstatically the ripeness and magnitude of his lyric powers. His intellect was at its zenith; he was capable, as rarely before, and still more rarely afterwards, of clothing his thought with the most sumptuous and most radiant veils of imagination, and yet of retaining his command over its movement. In other times and cases we find Swinburne the slave of his own splendours,

carried whither he would not by the Pythian intoxication of words. But this is not the case in the finest pages of *Songs before Sunrise*, and fine pages in that book are as leaves in Vallombrosa. In "Hertha," in "The Pilgrims," in "Tiresias," we are surprised to discover the most rapturous of troubadours transformed into one of the great poetic intelligences of the modern world.

A passage from a private letter may be quoted at this place. On the 17th of April 1868, Swinburne, after saying that "illness hardly intermittent during weeks and months of weather which would have disgraced hell and raised a revolution among the devils," has yet been steadily at work on what was later known as *Songs before Sunrise*:

> I have lots of work in embryo, and some already born. I have *such* a subject before me, untouched—Tiresias at the grave of Antigone—*i.e.* (understand), Dante at the grave of Italia. I do not say the living heir and successor of Dante as a patriot, for *he* sees her slowly but hopefully rising, though with pain and shame and labour. My beloved chief [Mazzini] is still with us, very ill and indomitable, and sad and kind as ever.

All this labour, all the fury and flame of intellectual productivity, could not be indulged in without manifest danger to his health. A long stay in London was once more disastrous, and his epileptic attacks recurred. By a distressing chance, it was during one of these fits that the writer of these pages first cast eyes upon the poet who was later to honour him with his friendship. The circumstances were terrifying in the

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extreme. It was on the 9th of July 1868, rather late in the afternoon. Swinburne had fallen in a fit while working in the reading-room of the British Museum, and had cut his forehead superficially against the iron staple of the desk. I was walking along a corridor when I was passed by a couple of silent attendants rapidly carrying along in a chair what seemed to be a dead man. I recognised him instantly from his photographs which now filled the shop windows. His hanging hands, closed eyelids, corpse-white face, and red hair dabbled in blood presented an appearance of the utmost horror, but I learned a few days later that his recovery was rapid and complete.

An illness of his mother's again delayed him, but as soon as he could get away, he again joined Powell, who now had rented a villa near Étretat, and Swinburne did not return till the weather began to grow chilly in November. To this residence, which has since disappeared, Powell gave the preposterous name of Dolmancé, and Jean Lorrain, who visited it later, has described it as standing :

> en plein verger de fleurs, une vraie chaumière à toit de chaume, au beau milieu d'un préau de pommiers : tout à l'entour de profondes cavées, ces sortes des chemins creux, ombragés et toujours frais, même au moment de la canicule, que forment en Normandie les hauts talus, plantés de hêtres. L'endroit est calme, en pleine vallée, déjà loin de la mer.

The poet indulged to his fill in his favourite pastime of sea-bathing, so recklessly indeed that in the early part of October 1868 he was very nearly drowned by being carried out to sea on the

tide that was setting from the Porte d'Amont. He was never a powerful swimmer, in consequence of the weakness of his arms, but he was untiring, and accustomed to relieve his limbs by frequently floating. He had, however, nearly reached the limits of his endurance when he was sighted by a fishing-vessel, the *Marie Marthe*, which was making for Yport, where the poet was ultimately landed, wrapped in a sail.[1] An inquisitive and precocious collegian, home for the holidays, offered his services and was received by the English friends. This was Guy de Maupassant, who has left an account of Swinburne's appearance and manner at this time, which, if highly coloured, is of extreme value. Offenbach also visited Powell and Swinburne at Étretat.

In describing to me a few years later the episode of his being nearly drowned at Étretat, Swinburne said that as he floated to his death, as he supposed, he reflected with satisfaction that his republican poems were nearly ready for the press, and that Mazzini would "be pleased with" him. The natural meaning of this statement is that the collection ultimately called *Songs before Sunrise* was practically complete as early as October 1868, and we have already seen that large portions of it were written and revised by that time, although other pieces of importance were added sporadically during the next two years and a half. The indications of date in the poems themselves are of a very illusive

[1] In my *Portraits and Sketches* (1912) I gave, for the first time, a full account of this curious episode.

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kind. But it is believed that "Hertha," perhaps the most original and powerful of all Swinburne's lyrical writings, was composed in the course of 1868.

On returning from Étretat, at any rate, he seems to have given the over-trumpeted Republic a quiet interval. He brought out at last his bulky prose volume, so long delayed, on *William Blake*. It was from the Rossettis, and as soon as Algernon came into close relation with them, that he first heard of that painter-poet. The name of the visionary was already a shibboleth among the Pre-Raphaelites. D. G. Rossetti had bought, so long back as 1847, a book of Blake's drawings and MS. verses, and the great interest which he and his brother had ever since taken in the subject was crystallised by the labours of their friend, Alexander Gilchrist, who, having published a good *Life of Etty*, settled down to the far more difficult task of preparing a *Life of Blake*. Gilchrist died, still young, in 1861, and left this work unfinished; it was completed by his widow, Anne Gilchrist, with the help of the Rossettis. Swinburne was taken into everybody's confidence about Gilchrist's book, which appeared, at last, in two handsome volumes in 1863; it still marks a stage in the progress of art-criticism.

Swinburne's *William Blake*, which was five years in hand, began, as a review of Gilchrist's posthumous work, before he started for Italy in February 1864. At Florence, his conversations with Blake's old friend, Seymour Kirkup, modified Swinburne's views on some

points. His review remained unprinted, and gradually expanded into a massive monograph. As he went on, and in the process of examining anew the MS. lyrics and the Prophetic Books of Blake, Swinburne's opinions underwent considerable further change, and this is felt in the texture of his book as it now stands.

The *William Blake*, however, despite this disadvantage, is a work of high enthusiasm and solid erudition, which must always be read with respect, whatever new lights are projected on the art of Blake. It carried the just appreciation of his marvellous gifts much further on than the praiseworthy labours of the Gilchrists had done. Swinburne was the first critic to refrain from apologising for Blake as an eccentric or lunatic person with flashes of genius; he claimed systematic appreciation for his productions at large. The two most novel features of Swinburne's criticism were his analysis of Blake's mysticism and his laborious and illuminating examination of the Prophetic Books, which even the most initiated admirers had up to that time rejected as impenetrable. D. G. Rossetti himself attempted to dissuade Swinburne from what he condemned as labour lost, but Swinburne showed firmness as well as acumen in insisting on his defence of these difficult compositions. He wrote: "I am bound to register my protest against the contempt and condemnation which these Books have incurred, thinking them, as I do, not unworthy the trouble of commentary," and the verdict of the best subsequent criticism has been wholly on his side. Gilchrist had expressed a

wish that the old man who appears entering an open door, star in hand, at the beginning of Blake's *Jerusalem*, could be induced to guide us through "those infinite dark passages and labyrinthine catacombs of invention," which such books as *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* present to us. Swinburne very pertinently replies that, as this is impossible, we had best apply our minds to finding out a pathway for ourselves.

At the close of this year, Swinburne undertook to make a selection from Coleridge's Poems, and to write a critical essay. Of the latter enterprise he wrote (Dec. 21, 1868): "It will be a more congenial labour to me than the Selection from Byron, who is not made for selection—Coleridge is. In my eyes his good poems have no fault, his bad poems no merit; and to disengage these from those will be a pleasure to me." He performed the task with remarkable skill, and laid down for the first time, with complete courage, the lines which have been accepted ever since by the best judges of this capricious and difficult, but extremely fascinating poet. At Christmas 1868 Swinburne paid his first, and perhaps his only, visit to Cambridge, being entertained in college by a kindred spirit, Bendysshe of King's.

In February 1869 Swinburne wrote to a friend: "I have been busy upon my new book, and have done a good deal of work, but not yet finished, though I see land, and most of the poems I read to you when unfinished are now complete or nearly. . . . I have written a modern companion-in-arms-and-metre to my 'Hymn to

Proserpine,' called 'Hymn of Man' (during the session in Rome of the Oecumenical Council), by the side of which *Queen Mab* is as it were an archdeacon's charge, and my own previous blasphemies are models of Christian devotion." In the spring of that year, after some quiet months at Holmwood and Oxford, visits to Jowett at Balliol College and to Mr. Julian Field at Merton College, Swinburne came again to London. He had given up his rooms in Dorset Street, and after a long interval took fresh ones at 12 North Crescent, Bedford Square, where he was to live when in town for the next four years and a half. He was now suffering from reaction after the very intense and prolonged excitement in which he had indulged, and he endured a good deal of discomfort from languor and irritability.

This was not a happy period in his life, and it was not a fertile one. After the immense activity and productivity of the three preceding years, 1869 and 1870 have very little to show. He wrote critical articles for the *Fortnightly Review*, and he composed at least one important poem, "The Eve of Revolution," which seems to have been finished at Holmwood in July of the first-named year. A review of *L'Homme qui rit* brought from Victor Hugo a characteristic letter (July 14, 1869),—"Merci, *ex imo corde*, de votre magnifique travail sur mon livre. Quelle haute philosophie, et quelle intuition profonde vous avez! Dans le grand critique, on sent le grand poëte." A scheme to bring out a volume of republican poems in that autumn fell through. Richard Burton, who was now appointed British

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consul at Damascus, returned from Brazil to London, in rather poor health; he was advised to take a course of the Vichy waters before proceeding to Syria. He proposed that Swinburne, who was already at Étretat, should join him at Boulogne. This was done, and the friends arrived at Vichy on the 24th of July 1869. Five days later the poet wrote: "Vichy suits me splendidly," and indeed he was now entering upon some of the most completely happy moments of his life. He delighted in the breezy company of Burton, and at Vichy they found two other friends, Frederic Leighton and Adelaide Kemble (Mrs. Sartoris). Mrs. Sartoris sang to the friends, and her voice was still "in the days of its glory." Swinburne, unskilled as he was in all the technical part of music, confessed her singing to be "miraculous and ravishing." A quarter of a century later he declared that it was still vibrating in his brain. The memory of this enchanting encounter was celebrated by Swinburne in 1896, when, on hearing of Lord Leighton's death, he wrote the poem called "An Evening at Vichy."

While he was thus enjoying himself, he was lifted into the seventh heaven by an invitation from Victor Hugo, whose *L'Homme qui rit* he had rapturously reviewed in the current number of the *Fortnightly*, to come and visit him at Hauteville House in Guernsey. This came to nothing, but he made some stay in Paris, where he met Paul de Saint-Victor and, perhaps, Louis Blanc; while in the late autumn he seems to have spent several weeks in the neighbourhood

of Grenoble. He had more correspondence with Victor Hugo who, on the 17th of November, called the attention of Paul Meurice to Swinburne's high merits. "M. Swinburne," Hugo now wrote, "est celui que Louis Blanc qualifiait dernièrement dans *Le Temps*: *le premier poète anglais actuel.*" Swinburne was beginning to enjoy a "European reputation," or Victor Hugo would not have recommended a translation "en tout ou en partie" of his articles in *Le Rappel.* On his return to this country Swinburne had the happiness of seeing Mazzini again during his last brief visit to England, and the pride of conducting him to the house on Clapham Common of Swinburne's excellent Greek friends, the Spartalis, whose acquaintance he had made at Madox Brown's house. At Clapham Common, too, he met Ricciotti Garibaldi. In the winter he paid a short visit to George Meredith at Kingston.

Little marks the next year, 1870, except a very elaborate criticism, "reviewing the unborn" *Poems* of D. G. Rossetti, of which, in sending the MS. to John Morley on the 15th of April, Swinburne said: "I have now touched on every poem—in fact given a thorough and most careful analysis of the whole book. I never took so much pains in my life with any prose piece of work." He seems to have been at Étretat again in the summer, for the last time; the outbreak of the war sent the friends flying back to England. It was at this time that he wrote the sonnets on Armand Barbès, who had died at the Hague in June. Swinburne was already safe in England

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when the French Republic was proclaimed by Gambetta, Ferry and Favre in Paris, on the 4th of September. He instantly hailed the formation of the government of National Defence as the arrival of a French millennium, and within two days he had composed and sent to press his long *Ode on the Proclamation of the French Republic.*

Swinburne's business relations with J. C. Hotten since 1866 had not been happy. There was recriminatory correspondence about the number of copies printed and sold. A new publisher now appeared, in the person of Mr. F. S. Ellis (1830–1901), a friend of the whole Pre-Raphaelite circle, a man of the highest integrity, and an enthusiastic admirer, who promised the poets a brilliant *format* for their works. He was in partnership with Mr. G. M. Green, who died in 1872. Swinburne was strongly urged to transfer his earlier books to this new firm, but Hotten refused to surrender them, and threatened to go to law. Howell may, or may not, have arranged the matter very tactfully, but he was certainly to be sympathised with when he learned (Sept. 9) that Swinburne, without consulting him, had forwarded the *Ode on the Proclamation of the French Republic* to Ellis, and had already seen and corrected the proofs. At the same time, Swinburne promised Ellis to give him the great book of republican lyrics which was now almost ready for the press.

The publication of the *Ode* highly incensed Hotten, who renewed threats of legal proceedings, based on conversations the accuracy of which Swinburne denied. Even when *Songs before Sun-*

rise was in type, Ellis hesitated to issue the book without legal sanction. It was to have been out in October 1870, but Hotten opposed publication, saying that he had a right to whatever Swinburne produced. A counter-blow was struck by insisting that Hotten should submit his accounts to examination. The dispute, which was costly and annoying, was prolonged into November, when it was submitted to the arbitration of Moy Thomas, who smoothed matters over. The quarrel with Hotten broke out again three years later, when all relations between him and Swinburne closed. But Ellis and Green, advised by their lawyers that they might now safely do so, published *Songs before Sunrise* at last in the spring of 1871.

Miss Alice Bird recollects Swinburne arriving at her brother's house with the first proofs of *Songs before Sunrise* in his pocket, and a little later in the evening his dancing about the room convulsed with passion while he half-read, half-recited them to her brother and herself. In particular, those in which Napoleon III. was denounced he repeated with such violence, and as she puts it amusingly to me, "with such poison," that his voice sounded like the hissing of serpents, while he jigged round the room, his hair flying out behind him, and his arms flapping and fluttering at his sides. At these times, when he was transfigured by excitement, his wonderful head looked like that of a young god, if only the weak mouth and the receding chin could be ignored. Directly the storm of melody was over, and the poem put away, Algernon

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would sink down on a sofa with the gentleness of a child, and his voice would immediately resume its rich, soft cadences.

The Ode on the Proclamation of the French Republic came out at a moment when public interest was wholly diverted from literature by the war, and it produced little effect. It is not one of Swinburne's best efforts, and it lacks continuity and plan. The opening strophe, with its affluence of rhymes like peals of bells, is very beautiful, but this rapture leads to nothing, it is mere frantic ecstasy. The careful reader will note in the *Ode* occasional direct reminiscences of Shelley, such as are very rare in Swinburne; but he had been studying the text of Shelley minutely during the preceding summer, and he was always something of a chameleon. Very little knowledge of the real political condition of Europe or even of France is shown in the *Ode*. Only towards the close of the epode is there any recognition of the actual state and pressing danger of France; like many other people, Swinburne thought too much of the victory at Combières. His poem had not been four months in the hands of his readers before William I. was crowned German Emperor in the Galerie des Glaces of the palace of Versailles. Swinburne averted his eyes completely from the subsequent history of Europe.

The earlier portion of his own career closes with the publication of *Songs before Sunrise*, which is probably — from a point of view detached from the attractiveness of subject—Swinburne's cardinal and crowning work. Nowhere else has he brought together so much lyrical writing—

and he was pre-eminently a lyrist — which is uniformly rapid in movement, rich in thought, sumptuous in language, and uplifted in tone. There are superfluities here, but they are less conspicuous than they are in his later writings, while there is a total, and if we consider it, an extraordinary absence of the hectic and morbid ornament which had been at once the charm and the danger of *Poems and Ballads*. The forty poems of which the new volume is composed breathed so consistent a spirit of pure self-sacrifice and impassioned devotion that they amazed the admirers of "Félise" and "Dolores." In his "Prelude," one of the noblest exercises of reasoned imagination which exist in the English language, Swinburne explained the causes of the change:

A little time we gain from time
To set our seasons in some chime,
For harsh or sweet or loud or low;
With seasons played out long ago
And souls that in their time and prime
Took part with summer or with snow,
Lived abject lives out or sublime,
And had their choice of seed to sow
For service or disservice done
To those days dead and this their son.

A little time that we may fill
Or with such good works or such ill
As loose the bonds or make them strong
Wherein all manhood suffers wrong.
By rose-hung river and light-foot rill
There are who rest not; who think long
Till they discern as from a hill
At the sun's hour of morning-song,
Known of souls only and those souls free,
The sacred spaces of the sea.

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His muse had been "converted"; it was no longer in the service of sensual pleasure and of sloth; it repudiated the gardens of Armida. If other poets continued to "flush with love and hide in flowers"—and the allusion was to William Morris and his *Earthly Paradise* — Swinburne offered no blame:

> Play then and sing; we too have played,
> We likewise, in that subtle shade.
> We too have twisted through our hair
> Such tendrils as the wild Loves wear,
> And heard what mirth the Maenads made,—
> Till the winds blew our garlands bare,
> And left their roses disarrayed,—

the winds of conviction that a nobler purpose than idling with "Pleasure slumberless and pale, and Passion with rejected veil," demands the unfettered energy of a thinking man when the first dim goddesses of instinct, with their singing tongues of fire, are mute. The danger of sinking "helmless in middle turn of tide" lies before the soul that does not steer resolutely for the direct haven of duty, and what "duty" is had now revealed itself violently to the heart of Swinburne. He must no longer live for himself, for pleasure, for literature, even for England, but devote all the forces of his genius to celebrating the "serene Republic of a world made white," and, if need be, to die for it. That caricature of him which Lady Trevelyan had made when he was a boy, striding across a barricade, might have been reproduced as a vignette to *Songs before Sunrise*.

But, after the passage of nearly half a century,

and after so many vicissitudes of European history, the subject of this great group of solemn and generous poems is one which militates against our intelligent enjoyment of them. At the very outset, the Franco-German War disturbed the scheme of the poet and made bankrupt his golden raptures. Year by year, crisis by crisis, Europe was carried further and further along the stream of her destiny, and wider and wider from the course laid down with emphatic passion in such outbursts of prophecy as "The Eve of Revolution" or "The Litany of Nations." It is difficult, and even before the close of 1871 it became almost as difficult as it is now, to enter into the delirium of instant hope of such a poem as "Mater Triumphalis," or to appreciate the passion for an "immeasurable Republic" which inspired "Quia Multum Amavit." There could be no doubt that Swinburne loved much, but when he addressed the vague spirit of republican Liberty in terms which a penitent might adopt at the altar of his God, he disconcerted his readers.

> Thou art the player whose organ-keys are thunders,
> And I beneath thy foot the pedal prest;
> Thou art the ray whereat the rent night sunders,
> And I the cloudlet borne upon thy breast,

he sings; and our appreciation of the almost unparalleled beauty of the rhetoric is marred by a consciousness that this Liberty was largely a chimaera, a vain fancy of the poet's own unselfish imagination.

The source of the political ardour of Swinburne and the form taken by his lyrical apocalypse are somewhat obscure. We are not accustomed in

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the history of literature to find a poet so passionately excited about problems of statecraft which do not affect his own life in any way, and with the results of which he will never be brought in contact. When Tyrtaeus or Campbell pours forth battle-songs it is because he is a Lacedaemonian or an Englishman, and is personally identified with England or Sparta. But when Swinburne writes an ode to the bereaved Signora Cairoli[1] in which he says:

> But four times art thou blest,
> At whose most holy breast
> Four times a God-like soldier-saviour hung;

or when he addresses Italy:

> The very thought in us how much we love thee
> Makes the throat sob with love and blinds the eyes,

we are embarrassed by the knowledge that he had no relations and hardly any acquaintances in a country which he only visited twice, as a tourist, for a few weeks.

There is a similarity of emotional political utterance in *Songs before Sunrise* and in such series of recent patriotic *canzoni* as are contained in the *Elettra* or the *Gesta d' Oltremare* of Gabriele D' Annunzio, but in the latter case it is an Italian who blows the clarion of a new dawn in his own Italy. It is certainly strange to find an equal ecstasy in Swinburne, who was not a participator, but a

[1] An ode to her son Giovanni Cairoli, in Carducci's *Giambi ed Epodi* (1870), may be compared with Swinburne's. An examination of the two volumes, almost exactly contemporaneous, and breathing the same anger against Napoleon III., Austria, and the priesthood, would be interesting. Swinburne seems to have been, and to have remained, unconscious of the existence of Carducci.

spectator. Yet the vehemence of the passion was absolutely genuine, and it was overpowering. But this apparent causelessness of the emotion, and its vain violence as of a whirlwind in a vacuum, add to our difficulty in placing ourselves in a sensitive relation with a noble body of poetry.

Swinburne's own attitude to *Songs before Sunrise*, however, should not be overlooked. To the end of his life he continued to regard it as the most intimate, the most sincere, and the most important of all his writings. He was greatly disappointed if any critic, however lavish of praise in other quarters, depreciated it; and over and over again he repeated to his private friends his conviction that his "other books are books, *Songs before Sunrise* is myself." He wished it to be studied in relation with *A Song of Italy*, "or rather as the steamer of which that was the tug." He wrote to Stedman, several years later: "Of all I have done I rate 'Hertha' highest as a single piece, finding in it the most of lyric force and music combined with the most of condensed and clarified thought. I think there really is a good deal compressed and condensed into that poem."

There is an aspect of *Songs before Sunrise*, moreover, which must not be overlooked in our estimate of the personal attitude of the poet. He was infatuated with the dream of Italian revolution, but there was something higher and vaster behind the dream. The purely intellectual quality in this body of lyrical verse was admirable, and so original as to be almost un-

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paralleled since the days of ancient Greece. Swinburne conceived the Republic, not merely as a convenient method of democratic government, but as being the tangible embodiment of freedom in the action of society at its very highest development. This was a conception not easily intelligible to the readers of popular poetry, but it did not pass without honourable recognition from the advanced leaders of philosophic thought. In particular, Professor W. K. Clifford early insisted on the intellectual importance of Swinburne's idealism, giving his lyrics a prominence which philosophers habitually grudge to poets.[1] He described Swinburne as one "into whose work it is impossible to read more or more fruitful meaning than he meant in writing it," and this is the answer to the reproach of those who find themselves borne so vehemently on the tide of his melody that they fail to note the course of their pilot.

Swinburne's claim to be considered as among the most purely philosophical of all the English poets is founded on several numbers of *Songs before Sunrise*, none of which are directly occupied with the aims of Mazzini or the errors of Napoleon III. In "Mater Triumphalis," in the "Prelude" and the "Epilogue," in "The Litany of Nations," in "Hertha" pre-eminently, we see a statement of Swinburne's loftiest doctrine. They establish that the summit of freedom is that condition in which the Spirit of Humanity acts and moves with the severest ethical propriety. In the phrase of Epictetus, which Swin-

[1] See Professor Clifford's *Cosmic Emotion*, published in 1877.

burne loved to repeat, it is when "the little soul" is least hampered by "the corpse which is Man" that human nature reaches its altitude. Liberty, Swinburne used as the name for the Soul, when it succeeds in breaking and casting off the shackles of its dead rudiments and survivals. This is an organic action, the result of the exalted union of the best parts of humanity. Liberty, in other words, is "the Mother of Life, personifying herself in the good works of mankind." It is that ideal which T. H. Green (with whom, we may recollect, Swinburne had been associated at Oxford) was to define ten years later as "The maximum of power for all members of human society alike to make the best of themselves."[1] The emotion of the poet in presence of the supreme and eternal characteristics of the universe gave to the noblest parts of *Songs before Sunrise* an intensity unique in English literature, and probably to be compared with nothing else written since the Greeks produced cosmological hymns in the fifth century B.C.

It has been alleged that Swinburne imitated Victor Hugo in the form of *Songs before Sunrise*. Doubtless the attitude of a man whom he admired so enthusiastically, and of whom he so utterly approved, was not without its effect. But the more closely we seek for a prototype to Swinburne's republican lyrics in those of Hugo the less surely shall we find it. Neither *Les Contemplations* nor *Les Châtiments* offers really a parallel case.

[1] *Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract*, a lecture delivered at Leicester in 1881.

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Indeed, *Les Quatre Vents de l'esprit*, in certain parts, much more closely approximates to *Songs before Sunrise*, but it was published ten years later, and shall we dare to advance the theory that Hugo imitated Swinburne? It is true that on rare occasions the careful reader may find in *Les Châtiments* phrases and even stanzas that must have influenced the English poet. No more curious example could be pointed to than

> Quand l'Italie en deuil dressa, du Tibre au Pô,
> Son drapeau magnifique,
> Quand ce grand peuple, après s'être couché troupeau,
> Se leva république,
>
> C'est toi, quand Rome aux fers jeta le cri d'espoir,
> Toi qui brisas son aile,
> Toi qui fis retomber l'affreux capuchon noir
> Sur sa face éternelle!

But in the political poetry of Victor Hugo there is far more that is personal, episodical, actual, in other words, amusing, than in *Songs before Sunrise*, where the solemn fierceness and tenderness are never relieved by a note of domestic or rustic realism. Perhaps such pieces as "Before a Crucifix" and "To Walt Whitman in America" come nearest to introducing this variety of tone and colour, yet nothing here is so "amusing," in the true sense, as "Le Chasseur Noir" or "Souvenir de la Nuit du 4." On the other hand, there is a purity of language, a Simonidean grace, revealed not once nor twice, but over and over again in *Songs before Sunrise*, which is more delicate, more exquisite, than all but the best of

Victor Hugo. When Swinburne writes "The Pilgrims," "The Oblation," "Quia Multum Amavit," and so many others, he breaks the alabaster box of spikenard over the bowed head of the goddess of Liberty.

CHAPTER VII

THE MIDDLE YEARS

(1870–1879)

WHEN Swinburne was in his thirty-fourth year an incident occurred which would be too trifling for record in the career of a man of action, but which exercised on his cloistered spirit an extraordinary influence. In 1864 he had been elected a member of the Arts Club, to which many of his immediate associates belonged. Swinburne, whose movements in London were extremely precise, was accustomed to spend a part of every day in the Club, where he wrote his letters, enjoyed the conversation of his friends, and occasionally entertained strangers. In a life so monotonous as his, the Club was a wholesome and an important element of daily change. Unfortunately, during the summer of 1870, in circumstances which were widely related at the time, he had a difference with the Committee of the Arts Club, and he was asked to resign. He considered that he had been harshly treated, and there arose in his mind a spirit of resentment and suspicion which took up its abode there, and never completely left him. From that day forth, Swinburne never consented to be a candidate

for any public or private body of men; he held himself persistently aloof from all general companionship. Without losing his charming amiability, and almost childlike sweetness, towards those of whose fidelity he was certain, he became affected with a suspiciousness and a tendency to take offence which showed themselves in outbursts of disconcerting violence, and made the tone of the controversies which he now more and more lightly courted often as unseemly as it was extravagant.

Nor was this strange duality of sweetness and fierceness the only anomaly of his character, for from this time forth the discrepancy between his behaviour in London and in the country became more remarkable than ever. It is not necessary to dwell on much that was distressing, and even alarming, in his town habits, but to those who only saw him at Holmwood, or during his visits to Jowett, or at Ashburnham, the legend of a tempestuous Algernon seemed a fable. An interesting letter from Henry Kingsley, written at Datchet in 1871, exactly defines the situation:

> The Swinburnes and ourselves are neighbours and friends. The Admiral and Lady Jane Swinburne have bought Holmwood, old Lady Stanley of Alderley's home. They are very agreeable neighbours to us, for they have the best library of its size I have ever seen. I believe Algy is very eccentric in London, but I never see him there. Here he is a perfectly courteous little gentleman.

It was towards the end of December 1870 or the beginning of January 1871 that I was presented to Swinburne at an evening-party in the

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studio of Ford Madox Brown, to whose family and hospitable house in Fitzroy Square I had been introduced by William Bell Scott. On this occasion I had the privilege of meeting for the first time several persons now celebrated. Mrs. William Morris, in her ripest beauty, and dressed in a long unfashionable gown of ivory velvet, occupied the painting-throne, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who, though still almost young, was yet too stout for elegance, squatted—for some part of the evening at least—on a hassock at her feet. The "marvellous boy, that perished in his prime," Oliver Madox Brown, carrying on his arms and shoulders tame white rats, shattered the nerves of the ladies. Spontaneity of behaviour in society was at that time encouraged by the Pre-Raphaelites. But among so much that was wonderful, I continued riveted to the aspect of Swinburne, who indulged me with quite a long conversation. His kindness, at once, became like the kindness of an elder brother. In some ways he fulfilled, and more than fulfilled, the promise of my hero-worship.

At the same time, I have to confess that there was something in his appearance and in his gestures which I found disconcerting, and which I have a difficulty in defining without a suspicion of caricature. He was not quite like a human being. Moreover, the dead pallor of his face and his floating balloon of red hair, had already, although he was but in his thirty-third year, a faded look. As he talked to me, he stood, perfectly rigid, with his arms shivering at his sides, and his little feet tight against each other, close to a low

settee in the middle of the studio. Every now and then, without breaking off talking or bending his body, he hopped on to this sofa, and presently hopped down again, so that I was reminded of some orange-crested bird—a hoopoe, perhaps—hopping from perch to perch in a cage. The contrast between these sudden movements and the enthusiasm of his rich and flute-like voice was very strange. In course of a little time, Swinburne's oddities ceased to affect me in the slightest degree, but on this first occasion my impression of them was rather startling than pleasant.

Whether in London or at Holmwood, Swinburne was now always at work. Before *Songs before Sunrise* had left the press he was closely occupied with a dramatic continuation of that history of Mary, Queen of Scots which he had begun in *Chastelard*. This was to become *Bothwell*. It was planned on a very large scale, and Swinburne felt "at times crushed under the Tarpeian weight" of his materials. Nevertheless, he finished a First Act, which Frederick Locker set up in type for him, but which he afterwards modified; and he wrote a Scene or two more, then dropping the scheme for two or three years. In the early summer of 1871 his extravagances reduced him to such a state of health that his father, warned by Lord Houghton, came up to town and carried him off to Holmwood, where he promptly recovered. Jowett proposed that he should recuperate by paying him a visit at Oxford, and Swinburne arrived late in May. Taine, who was spending a long time in England

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in 1871, met Swinburne at the Lodge of Balliol College on the 3rd of June. He wrote home to his wife next day as follows :

> Présenté à M. Swinburne le poète ; ses vers sont dans le genre de Baudelaire et de Victor Hugo : petit homme roux en redingote et cravate bleue, ce qui faisait contraste avec tous les habits noirs et cravates blanches : il ne parle que raidi, rejeté en arrière avec un mouvement convulsif et continu des membres comme s'il avait le *delirium tremens* — très passionné pour la littérature française moderne, Hugo, Stendhal, et pour la peinture. Son style est d'un visionnaire malade qui, pour système, cherche la sensation.

Matthew Arnold appears to have been staying with Jowett at the same time, and Taine formed an even less favourable impression of him.[1] A few days later Swinburne was taken unwillingly to the Senate House to see an honorary degree conferred upon Taine, about whom he was not enthusiastic. He frequently escaped from Balliol to visit Brasenose, where Walter Pater, with whom he was now for a short time intimate, entertained him ; and Exeter College, where he was welcome to Bywater, who once gave me a most amusing account of how Jowett swooped down on Swinburne, and carried him off like an indignant nurse, with a glare at Bywater as he did so. Jowett invited him to join a reading-party at Tummel Bridge, near Pitlochry, and Swinburne started on the 11th of August. He now gave much practical help in Jowett's scheme for editing a *Children's Bible*, which appeared in 1873. He was by this time the

[1] *H. Taine : sa vie et correspondance*, tome iii. Paris, 1905.

subject of great public curiosity, and a whisper having been spread abroad that he would appear at church, "the sacred edifice was unusually full, owing to men of reading-parties" who came from far and wide with "the uncanonical purpose" of bringing down the poet. But this, as Jowett observed, "was taking a very bad shot." One visitor, however, gratified his curiosity, but not at church. Algernon wrote (Aug. 24, 1871):

> Browning is our neighbour in these latitudes; he came over the day before yesterday in high feather. I have just read his new poem—it has very fine things in it, especially the part about Hercules—much finer than anything said about him by Euripides. But the pathos of the subject is too simple and downright for Browning's analytic method.

Swinburne found Pitlochry "very refreshing and good for the health, having a fine river to swim in and fine hills to climb."

Jowett considered that Algernon did not see enough people of various kinds, and he frequently invited him to the hospitable lodge of Balliol. The Master's choice of guests was somewhat miscellaneous, and it was about this time that he asked Blanche, Countess of Airlie, an old friend, to come to Oxford to meet Swinburne, George Eliot, and the first Lord Westbury. The idea of this remarkable trio alarmed Lady Airlie, who begged to be allowed to come "when Mr. Jowett was alone."

Early in September, at Jowett's instigation, Swinburne started from Pitlochry for an excursion "with an Oxford man named Harrison, whom I met *chez* Jowett," mainly on foot, first through Glencoe, then up the Caledonian Canal to Inverness,

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and finally to the Far West of the Highlands, to Lochs Maree and Torridon. The latter made a profound impression upon him. He wrote of it, at the time, as

> the divinest combination of lakes, mountains, straits, sea-rocks, bays, gulfs and open sea ever achieved by the forces of Hertha in her most favourable and fiercely maternal mood. I had a divine day there [Sept. 14], and swam right out of one bay round a beautiful headland to the next, and round again back under shelves of rock shining double in the sun above water and below.

When, nearly a quarter of a century later, he published the noble ode called "Loch Torridon," the vision was still bright in his memory. Some of the walking was over rough country, and one afternoon Swinburne became footsore, and then plaintive, and then deeply depressed and quite silent. Suddenly, however, they came upon a waterfall, and in an instant he was transformed, dancing before it in an ecstasy of delight and adoration; and in spite of his lameness he went on gaily, chanting one French lyric after another. This was told to Mr. Andrew C. Bradley by Edwin Harrison himself, who died many years ago.

The tour closed at Knockespock, the house of Algernon's uncle, Sir Henry Percy Gordon, in Aberdeenshire, where he was extremely happy; so that this proved a very fortunate half-year, at the close of which Algernon could, surprisingly, be described as "grown stout and sunburnt." But he insisted on returning to his old habits of life in London, where, in October, his father, having

been warned anonymously of his condition, found him, and carried him off to Holmwood. He rapidly recovered, as usual.

In the autumn and winter of 1871 Swinburne was mainly occupied on two enterprises of very various value and importance. One of these was the commencement of his solitary epic, *Tristram of Lyonesse*, the sumptuous prelude to which he finished at Tummel Bridge; and the other was his share in the controversy of the friends of D. G. Rossetti with the egregious "Thomas Maitland," who virulently attacked what he called "The Fleshly School of Poetry" in a magazine article. This pseudonymous criticaster turned out to be Mr. Robert Buchanan, who (in a letter of March 1872) confessed to Robert Browning that he had been largely prompted "by the instinct of recrimination." Swinburne's principal exploit in a vivacious series of skirmishes was a long pamphlet entitled *Under the Microscope* (1872), where force and learning are somewhat thrown away upon a theme not of permanent interest, and where the writer's prose style suffers from an inordinate abuse of ironical invective.

The three or four years which preceded the publication of *Bothwell* formed a period in Swinburne's life which differed from any before or after it. He came but little into the sight of the public, and his wonderful productive force seemed to be checked. This was, however, only apparent; during these years he was engaged, almost furiously, in preparing for the occupation of the rest of his life. He was studying Shakespeare

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and Aeschylus with the avowed intention of capturing the secret of their art. He was experimenting in many forms of poetry. He was steeping himself almost to satiety in the literatures of England and France. In particular, about the year 1872, the plan which he had formed in early boyhood of continuing and systematising the critical work of Charles Lamb as applied to the old English dramatists took definite shape. To Furnivall, with whom he was now on friendly terms, he suggested the publication of the works of Cyril Tourneur. This came to nothing, and the earliest evidence of his new enthusiasm was a study on John Ford, which Swinburne never surpassed, and never perhaps equalled in that special province. This essay deserves close attention, for it is one of Swinburne's greatest achievements in the art of concentrated and comparative eulogistic analysis. In form it displays his earnest discipleship of Paul de Saint-Victor, but it has a dignity and a breadth which surpass the qualities of his great French master. It has also, it must be admitted, not a little of that exaggeration of praise and tumid heat of attack which were in later years so seriously to impair the value of Swinburne's criticism. Beautiful and valuable in itself as is the "John Ford," we discover in it the germ of blemishes which ultimately made such essays of his old age as those on Dekker or Nabbes scarcely readable.

On October 23, 1872, Théophile Gautier died, and early in the following year the publisher Lemerre issued a handsome volume in quarto, *Le Tombeau de Théophile Gautier*, in which the

French poets of the day, led by Victor Hugo, celebrated the merits of an admirable artist. To this anthology—at the suggestion of José Maria de Heredia, transmitted by Mr. (now Sir) Sidney Colvin—Swinburne contributed no fewer than ten poems, no other writer sending more than two.

Swinburne had been influenced by Théophile Gautier, most of all no doubt by the preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, almost to excess, but he had not known him well. Indeed, in opposition to what has been alleged, it is doubtful whether he met Gautier more than once, when he was presented to him in the Salon Carré of the Louvre. So, at least, a fortnight before his death, he assured Professor James Fitzmaurice-Kelly.

Of the English poet's sheaf of tributes, two were in English, two in French, one in Latin and five in Greek, *ἐπιγράμματα ἐπιτυμβίδια εἰς Θεόφιλον*. These latter had received the somewhat hurried revision and approval of Jowett, who particularly praised the Latin choriambics. In these learned exercises Swinburne was happy to believe that he had no competitors in English poetry except Milton and Landor, neither of whom, moreover, was master of French composition. The sonnet and the ode in that language, on this occasion, were impeccable in prosody, and were admired in Paris. The French poems of Swinburne, as a French critic once wittily explained to me, are perfectly correct, and as like real French verse as the best Renaissance Latin poetry is like Catullus. The two English poems

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in the *Tombeau* of 1873 are the impish sonnet on *Mademoiselle de Maupin*:

> This is the golden book of spirit and sense,
> The holy writ of beauty,

composed in derision of the Philistines, and a noble elegy, splendid "in clear chryselephantine verse," which is valuable as showing that Swinburne's lyrico-elegiac genius had not begun to decline. Here, for the first time, he makes elegy serve as a species of ceremonial criticism on the life and work of the great man dead, an innovation which he was further to develop later.

That he was not unaware of the dangers which attended the excessive facility in versification which he had now attained is shown, curiously enough in connection with these very "Memorial Verses to Gautier," in a letter to Mr. John Morley (Nov. 21, 1872):

> The metrical effect is I think not bad, but the danger of such metres is diffuseness and flaccidity; I perceive this one to have a tendency to the dulcet and luscious form of verbosity which has to be guarded against, lest the poem lose its foothold and be swept off its legs, sense and all, down a flood of effeminate and monotonous music, or lost and spilt in a maze of what I call draggle-tailed melody. . . . I am going over the part already thrown off, to brace up the verses,—tighten the snaffles and shorten the girths of the Heliconian jade.

On January 9, 1873, as the result of an operation, the dethroned Napoleon III. died in exile. The event was one of lively interest to Swinburne, although the wretched monarch had ceased to exercise power or even influence. At first he

waited to see "whether the Master will be minded, —as he was in the case of Saint-Arnaud,—to bestrew with any funeral flowers the new tomb at Chislehurst" (Jan. 18). But Hugo was silent, and in May Swinburne published in the *Examiner* certain uproarious sonnets entitled "The Saviour of Society." The *Spectator*, which regarded the language of these as disrespectful to the memory of John Stuart Mill, who had just died (May 8), reproved Swinburne severely for "a gross parody on the most sacred of subjects," and the poet defended himself with spirit both in prose and verse. "To expose the grossness and absurdity of the insult or parody implied in [styling Napoleon III.] 'Messiah of Order' and 'Saviour of Society,' [Swinburne] thought good to carry the parallel a little further in an ironical address or form of prayer to be offered by his worshippers to the new Redeemer of their kind." That was all very well, but the *Spectator* still expressed "horror and disgust," and the poet was certainly ill-advised. The controversy, which attracted a great deal of public attention, brought forth no sign of repentance from Swinburne, and the sonnets, without modification, were reprinted two years later in *Songs of Two Nations*.[1]

Swinburne was much occupied with France at this time, but his face was obstinately turned backward. Here he could not comprehend the problems of the future, nor forget the injuries of the past. His extreme and unwavering

[1] Mr. T. J. Wise brought together for the first time the particular sonnets in question and the correspondence to which they led, together with a preface in which the whole story was told by me in detail. This was privately printed as a pamphlet in 1913.

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detestation of Napoleon III. was a remarkable characteristic of his temper. It dated back to his childhood, and was no doubt connected with the *coup d'État* of 1851, the results of which impressed his schoolboy imagination at Eton, but it was certainly confirmed from year to year by the attitude of Victor Hugo. Nothing Swinburne wrote exceeded in virulence some of the attacks on Napoleon made by the great exile from Jersey. But when Napoleon III. died, in pain and obscurity, at Chislehurst, having ceased for three years to be a power for good or for evil, France partly forgave him, and even Victor Hugo forgot him. Yet Swinburne neither forgot nor forgave, and to him it seemed as just to continue to execrate this miserable man six months after his death as it had been to abuse him six years before it.

The truth was that to the transcendental English poet Napoleon III. was not a man, but a symbol. All that the Christians in Rome had thought of Nero, Swinburne thought of Louis Bonaparte; to him the name represented tyranny in its feeblest, its most cruel, its most treacherous and debauched manifestation. It was a principle of evil which could never be pardoned. The essence of the series of sonnet-curses, *Dirae*, was ecstasy that "we have lived to say, The dog is dead." Swinburne enjoyed cursing, and he cursed extremely well, but it was not Hutton of the *Spectator* only who objected to these vociferous *Dirae*.

Late in this year Swinburne enjoyed a brush with Emerson, of all people in the world. In the course of 1873 Emerson and his daughter had visited England and Egypt; it was to be his last

excursion to Europe. He had scarcely returned to Concord when a blazing "interview" with him appeared in an American newspaper. This article caused a certain scandal, for in it Emerson was reported as animadverting with great severity upon several leading English contemporaries. Swinburne, in particular, was signalled out for abuse of a singularly revolting kind. A copy of the American newspaper was sent to him, marked, and he was exceedingly perturbed. He wrote to Emerson, expressing his conviction that the philosopher had been entirely misrepresented, and begging for a line of assurance to that effect.

It was a courteous and reasonable letter, and it is a great pity that Emerson did not think proper to reply to it. We know now that Emerson's health was not then very good. His silence, however, seemed outrageously injurious to Swinburne, who could not be prevented from writing a second epistle, of matchless invective. He admitted to me, when I mildly objected, that it was "perhaps mere furious scolding," but he sent it off all the same. Emerson remained silent. Swinburne then censured the person and character of the philosopher in a series of Latin epigrams, which he displayed with exultation to his friends. If these "Uranian or Cloacine" verses reached Emerson himself, the Sage of Concord was probably (and fortunately) unable to construe them.[1] Against Carlyle, too, there

[1] My friend Mr. Lewis N. Chase reminds me that Emerson, in his *English Traits*, 1856, said that Landor had "pestered" him "with Southey." This might seem to Swinburne disrespectful to Landor, but in fact Landor had immediately, in his *Letter to R. W. Emerson*, dealt with this matter, and had shown no offence.

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was some arrogant manifestation. The fact is that Swinburne was at this time in a state of acute intellectual irritability, which betrayed itself in his personal relations. His friendships cooled; he saw less of Lord Houghton, and gradually ceased to be in close relation with Rossetti, Morris, and even Burne-Jones. He was justly incensed with Howell, who, certainly, had never deserved his confidence; he contrived to quarrel with the indulgent Joseph Knight; and his association with Purnell began to close.

In this comparative isolation the friendship of Jowett was of the highest value to him. During these years, which were frequently painful, the great Master of Balliol preserved an influence that was serenely beneficial over the most wayward and the most brilliant of his old pupils. Visits to Oxford, protracted sojournings in Cornwall, at Holmwood, and—through successive autumns—in Scotland, long walks and long talks in which all came out that was best in the oddly-assorted couple, these more than anything else carried Swinburne across the reefs of a dangerous and critical time. Jowett displayed a wonderful tact in dealing with his guest, cajoling, calming, interesting him and even submitting his own translations to his disciple's judgment. Swinburne used with pride to tell how, when once staying at Balliol, the Master asked him to go over his first version of the *Symposium* of Plato with the Greek text, and see if anything seemed to him to need correction. Graciousness could go no further from the official representative of Greek at Oxford to one whose Oxonian career

had culminated in "total and scandalous failure." Swinburne bent ardently to the task, and, "feeling that it would be a rather mean and treacherous sort of deference or modesty which would preclude him from speaking, he took upon himself to say diffidently that if he had been called upon to construe" a certain sentence "he should have construed it otherwise. Mr. Jowett turned and looked at him with surprised and widened eyes: and said after a minute or so, 'Of course that is the meaning. You would be a good scholar if you were to study.'"

The anecdote is characteristic of the mutual relation of the two in these years.[1] Jowett was indulgently amused at Swinburne's violence of opinion. It was probably at this time that Mr. Asquith met the poet when both were guests at the Lodge of Balliol. Jowett chaffed Swinburne with having defended the propriety of regicide when he was a member of the Old Mortality at Oxford, and pretended to wonder what the other members of that society thought of his taking that view. "There was not one of us," Swinburne drew himself up and replied, "who would have questioned for a moment that sacred duty."

He gave way at this time, during his London visits, to great eccentricity, and Miss Bird informs me of an incident sufficiently droll. Her brother, the doctor, took Swinburne to a public dinner, where were present a considerable number of

[1] The late Professor Ingram Bywater, who was present at some of the symposia which led to the second edition of Jowett's *Plato*, reported to me cases in which Swinburne was more vivacious than this, yet the Master no less patient. "Another howler, Master!" "Thank you, Algernon, thank you!"

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journalists. The poet was politely asked whether he would be so kind as to propose the toast of "The Press." Dr. George Bird, knowing Swinburne's invincible objection to public speaking, declined the honour for him, but, on the request being repeated, was petrified to see Swinburne rise to his feet and shriek out the words: "The Press is a damnable institution, a horrible institution, a beastly institution," and then sink back into his seat, and close his eyes.

A new friend had appeared and then disappeared in the course of 1872. Theodore Watts, a lawyer of St. Ives in Huntingdonshire, came up to London with an ardent enthusiasm for the group of Pre-Raphaelites. He made the acquaintance of Rossetti and Morris without difficulty; to gain that of Swinburne was not so easy. His first attempt, which Watts used in later years to describe with considerable humour, was so unsuccessful that the door of hope seemed closed to him. However, towards the end of 1872, Madox Brown, after hearing of the misdeeds of Howell, recommended Swinburne to place his business affairs in the hands of Theodore Watts. Nothing very definite came of this until, in the autumn of the following year, Swinburne moved into rooms at 3 Great James Street, which he was to continue to occupy until he left London for good in 1879. He had some difficulty in getting free from earlier liabilities, and Watts, who had determined to settle in London, now stepped in with the proffer of professional advice, which was accepted. He called on the poet, and was further consulted about Swinburne's agreements

with publishers, which his previous agent had sadly mismanaged. The result was that Swinburne impulsively but wisely placed his affairs in faithful and competent hands. To his few intimate friends he announced the fact with a certain solemnity: for example, to Mr. John Morley he writes (Dec. 16, 1873):

> I am negotiating through a legal friend whom perhaps you know—Mr. Watts, a friend of Rossetti and others of my near friends, for the future publication of my works by Chapman and Hall. Mr. Chapman proposes to issue a cheap edition of my entire poems in the same form as his cheap edition of Carlyle. I have written at once in reply, expressing my readiness to [agree to] that.

But of this scheme nothing came.

The great labour of these years was the building up of *Bothwell*, a gigantic enterprise which, taken up in 1871 and dropped, was the almost unbroken occupation of 1873. It was a mounting structure, at which Swinburne toiled without, for a long time, any clear conception of its limits. It dilated in bulk and material at every step he took. He was well aware of its vastness. He wrote to Mr. John Morley:

> If ever accomplished, this drama will certainly be a great work in one sense, for, except that translation from the Spanish of an improperly named comedy in 25 acts published in 1631,[1] it will be the biggest (I fear) in the language. But having made a careful analysis of historical events from the day of Rizzio's murder to that

[1] The reference must be to Mabbe's translation of the *Celestina* of Fernando de Rojas. Professor J. Fitzmaurice-Kelly points out to me that Swinburne's memory as to the number of acts has slipped. "Putting it at the highest," he says, "there is no Spanish edition of the *Celestina* with more than 22 acts."

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of Mary's flight into England, I find that to cast into dramatic mould the events of those eighteen months it is necessary to omit no detail, drop no link in the chain, if the work is to be either dramatically coherent or historically intelligible; while every stage of the action is a tragic drama of itself which cries aloud for representation. The enormity of the subject, together with its incomparable capability (if only the strength of hand requisite were there) for dramatic poetry, assure me as I proceed more and more forcibly of the truth, which I suspected from the first, that Shakespeare alone could have grappled with it satisfactorily, and wrung the final prize of the tragedy from the clutch of historic fact. But having taken up the enterprise I will not at least drop it till I have wrestled my best with it.

He kept his word; and in March 1874 he closed the last scene of *Bothwell*. The giant drama was published three months later. It was received with great favour by the critics, and it pleased the public more than anything which Swinburne had published since *Poems and Ballads*. Frankly, the buyers of books admitted that they had had enough of his Republican odes and Italian aspirations, and they welcomed in *Bothwell* the chronicle-rendering of a story which was of perennial British interest. In spite of its portentous length (it ran to 532 full pages), it was bought and read.

The question had hardly begun to be asked in England whether theatrical literature not intended for the theatre had any right to exist. In bulk *Bothwell* resembles one of the five-act Jidai-Mono or classic plays of eighteenth-century Japan, and it could only be performed, like an oriental drama, on successive nights. Swin-

burne, as may be gathered from his letter to Lord Morley quoted above, was little concerned in approaching his subject from the point of view of stage-convenience. He poured out all that his memory and his imagination presented to him. When he wrote the opening scene, in August 1871, and gave it to Jowett to read, Jowett pronounced it much too long. Swinburne was surprised, but, having a great respect for Jowett's judgment, took the criticism very seriously. Accordingly next day—they were living in the hotel at Tummel Bridge—Swinburne stayed in bed all the morning to work on the scene. He produced it triumphantly at luncheon, when Jowett dryly observed that it was three lines longer than it was before. This was told to Mr. A. C. Bradley by Edwin Harrison, who was present; and I have in measure confirmed it by an examination of the manuscript.

Later on, at one of Jowett's reading-parties at West Malvern, R. W. Raper saw Swinburne suddenly fling himself on the floor at Jowett's feet, and heard him say, "Master, I feel I have never thanked you enough for cutting *four thousand* lines out of *Bothwell*." Jowett laughed and said, "Oh! I don't know, I don't know! I daresay I was quite wrong!" Public taste has changed in the course of forty years, and readers are now almost as impatient of unactable "poetic" dramas as playgoers are. This initial difficulty of bulk, therefore, cuts *Bothwell* off from our sympathy to-day, which is unfortunate, since it contains, in profusion, evidences of its author's genius in its most attractive aspect.

There is no other work of Swinburne which displays so unquestionably his gift for creating situation and interpreting character. There is none in which the language is of a more spirited simplicity or the verse more fluid. It is not, of course, the best play, but it is the finest dramatic romance produced in England throughout the nineteenth century, and among the myriad blank-verse imitations of the Elizabethans beloved of Charles Lamb, *Bothwell* floats supreme, a leviathan.

In a fine sonnet dedicatory to Victor Hugo, originally written, as appears from a letter to Mr. (now Sir) Sidney Colvin, on the 17th of January 1873, but afterwards much revised, Swinburne points out that over the scenes of *Bothwell*—

> Un peuple qui rugit sous les pieds d'une femme
> Passe, et son souffle emplit d'aube et d'ombre et de bruit
> Un ciel âpre et guerrier qui luit, comme une lame
> Sur l'avenir debout, sur le passé détruit.

This renders admirably the colour of the drama, grey, with flashes of steel. We have here the same Queen Mary who animated *Chastelard*, but she has grown older, fiercer, and craftier, and she towers over a more turbulent crowd of figures. Yet the later work, though more powerful, is worse fitted for the stage than the earlier. It overtly undertakes to be less a play than a dramatic romance; the author himself dismisses it as "mon drame *épique* et plein de tumulte et de flamme." The chronicle of events has certain chapters, rather than acts; one closes with the murder of Rizzio, a second with that of Darnley, a third with Mary's marriage, and the successive battles leave us on the shore of Solway Firth.

No work of Swinburne's later years gave him so much satisfaction as *Bothwell*. It was his constant pleasure to read it aloud, and he often forgot, in doing so, how quickly the time passed. Through one burning afternoon in the summer of 1873 Lord Morley tells me that he listened for five solid hours to a reading of *Bothwell*, and I myself, whose leisure was of less value, spent one evening of the same year from dinner-time to midnight, in company with Edward Burne-Jones and Arthur O'Shaughnessy, at the round table at 3 Great James Street, while Swinburne, lighted by the two great serpentine candlesticks he had brought with him from the Lizard, shrieked, thundered, whispered, and fluted the whole of the enormous second act.

Very little of 1874 was spent in London. After a Christmas at Holmwood, Swinburne stayed through January with Jowett at the Lizard. He announced himself "in love for life with Kynance Cove." He made a brief appearance in town to see *Bothwell* through the press, and then withdrew to the country for six months, living partly at Holmwood, partly at The Orchard in the Isle of Wight, where in August he was very nearly drowned while swimming. His audacity in the sea always exceeded his strength, though never his endurance. At Niton, under "the right auspices of sun and flowers and solitude," he read Hugo's *Quatre-vingt-treize*, and was disposed to agree with Morley that it is, "at least from some points of view, the most divinely beautiful work of the great Master, who has written me since I last

heard from you such a letter in acknowledgment of the dedication of *Bothwell* as I should like to show you, but have not the face to transcribe."

It was at this time that, during one of Swinburne's visits to the Master of Balliol, Prince Leopold, afterwards Duke of Albany, and then an undergraduate of one and twenty at Christ Church, called on him, but missed him. The poet returned the call, but the prince was out. Swinburne, however, was made aware of Prince Leopold's "genuine honest youthful interest in Art and Letters," and on several occasions expressed much sympathy with and curiosity about him. He characteristically described the prince — at second-hand and probably from Jowett's relation,—as "a thoroughly nice boy, modest and simple and gentle, devoted to books and poetry, without pretence or affectation," and in 1877 he protested against certain attacks made against the character and capacity of Prince Leopold. It would be difficult to name any other Royal Personage — except Queen Victoria herself — for whom Swinburne ever expressed any complaisance.

In April 1874 he was greatly, and justly, incensed by being put on the Byron Memorial Committee without his consent having been asked. This was particularly unfortunate in face of the excruciating prejudice against Byron in which he now indulged. The leader of this rather unlucky movement was Trelawny, Shelley's friend, now in his eightieth year. This picturesque buccaneer called on Swinburne to apologise, and was perfectly successful in soothing

his outraged feelings. "The piratical old hero calls me the last of the poets, who he thought all died with Byron. . . . A magnificent old Viking to look at." Swinburne found very old men irresistible, and quite a friendship sprang up between him and Trelawny. All this time Swinburne was mainly engaged in an exhaustive study of Chapman, which was begun as a commission, because Hotten said that unless Swinburne wrote an introduction, he would not risk the publishing of a reprint of Chapman. The money-payment offered by Hotten was a less inducement to Swinburne than the prospect of reviving the work of a poet whom he intensely admired. Charles Lamb had insisted, in terms of high enthusiasm, upon the beauty of some passages in the dramatic writings of the author of *Bussy d'Ambois*, but the recovery of Chapman's text, and the prominent position which he has since taken in the history of Elizabethan literature, are mainly due to Swinburne's unwearied battle on behalf of Chapman's claims.

Some of my earliest recollections of the conversation of Swinburne deal with his impassioned recommendation of the profuse and fiery genius of Chapman. On one of my first visits to him, I remember that he read aloud to me, with extreme vivacity, a monstrous tirade from *The Revenge*. I was not — and am not now — able to share without reserve his noble rage, and several months later in a letter dated February 21, 1874, I was subjected again to stern reproof for my "obstinate refusal" to do justice "to Chapman—above all to the

great cycle of French 'Histories,' which overflows with genius." These views he was then recording in full and final shape in the elaborate essay which was prefixed to Herne Shepherd's reprint, and was more luxuriously printed by itself in the volume called *George Chapman: A Critical Essay*, published at the close of 1874. The energy and ardour with which he worked upon the original text of these plays, which was excessively corrupt, affected Swinburne's health and particularly his eyesight unfavourably; and he was persuaded to relax during part at least of the following year.

It was after a beneficial rest that his cousin Mr. Mitford (Lord Redesdale), who had recently returned from a long diplomatic exile in the Far East, met him for the first time since their schooldays. Lord Redesdale writes to me about a small dinner-party at Whistler's:

> I was very much struck by Swinburne's appearance, the years had changed him so little. He had still the delicate features of a child. He looked so young that had it not been for the scanty beard, thin and straggling, that seemed quite unnatural, as if it had been not very skilfully stuck on by some theatrical Simmonds, he would have been the very Algernon of the 'fifties. The illusion was kept up by the gentle music of his voice, as caressing as I had known it a quarter of a century earlier. After dinner we sat together for a long while talking over the sunshine of boyhood, two old schoolfellows content to chatter about Eton, Windsor, the unforgettable joys of the Thames, with now and then a dip into the family story. When we parted it was with an eagerly expressed resolve to meet again as soon as possible, but alas! that never came off. Swinburne fell ill, his doctor kept

him in prison, and, once more and until the end, we drifted apart, not to meet again on this side of the Styx.

It was on the completion of the critical essay on Chapman that Swinburne was first fired with the notion of producing a complete study of the whole series of Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists. This occupied his thoughts until the very close of his life, and he left the scheme uncompleted. It slowly matured in the form of a book in two volumes, to be entitled *The Age of Shakespeare*. This was still unfinished when he died. Swinburne had no intention of delaying it so long. Mr. T. J. Wise has discovered by a memorandum in Swinburne's handwriting that this second series was to consist of essays on Chapman, Beaumont and Fletcher, Massinger, Day, Shirley, Brome, Nabbes, Davenport and (once more) Marlowe. Most of these were in type when he died, and the *Nabbes* and *Marlowe* were printed privately by Mr. Wise in 1914. This collection, therefore, which Swinburne began to compose more than forty years ago, and on the completion of which his heart was deeply set, may yet see the light in the form which he desired.

Soon after the beginning of 1875, when he was staying with Jowett at Ashfield House, West Malvern, I had happened to point out to Algernon in one of my letters that he had allowed the centenary of Walter Savage Landor's birth to pass unnoticed. Centenaries commonly did pass unnoticed in those days. In his reply (January 30), he expressed himself extremely vexed that he should have missed this historical landmark,

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but pointed out to me that, in less than a fortnight, another event would take place, the anniversary of Charles Lamb's birth. He suggested that we might commemorate with the same libations both the great men, who loved and admired each other in life, and whose memories, he thought, might fitly and gracefully be mingled after death in our affectionate recollection.

Accordingly, he undertook to organise for the 10th of February what he called "our Passover feast in honour of a Lamb quite other than Paschal," and proposed to come up to town specially for the purpose of making arrangements. I think it was the only time in his whole life that Swinburne ever "organised" anything; he was not gifted in a practical direction. However, he took up this Charles Lamb dinner very seriously, and came to town on Monday, the 8th, to settle all the details. He would not allow me to help him at all: "Leave it to me!" he said, in his grandest manner. Yet the dinner did come off. It was a rough entertainment, and the guests were few, but it did come off. There were but five of us who sat down to meat. There was Swinburne, of course, at the head of the table, looking very small in an immense arm-chair, but preserving a mien of rare solemnity. There was our dear and ever-cheerful William Minto, of Aberdeen, who left us so prematurely in 1893; there was that rather trying journalist, Thomas Purnell, who has also long been dead, and there were Theodore Watts and myself. That was the company, fit, perhaps, but certainly

From a drawing from life, in 1874, by Carlo Pellegrini

few. We met in a very old-fashioned hotel in Soho, and had a coarse, succulent dinner in the mid-Victorian style, very much I daresay in Charles Lamb's own taste. The extreme dignity of Swinburne is the feature of the dinner which remains most conspicuously in my memory; he sank so low in his huge arm-chair, and sat so bolt upright in it, that his white face, with its great aureole of red hair, beamed over the table like the rising sun. It was magnificent to see him, when Purnell, who was a reckless speaker, "went too far," bringing back the conversation into the paths of decorum. He was so severe, so unwontedly and phenomenally severe, that Purnell sulked, and taking out a churchwarden left us at table and smoked in the chimney-corner. Our shock was the bill—portentous! Swinburne, in "organising," had made no arrangement as to price, and when we trooped out into the frosty midnight, there were five long faces of impecunious men of letters.

The year 1875 was marked by what appeared to be an extraordinary activity, but in fact Swinburne's publications were more the result of previous labour than the evidence of what was actual. For instance, his essay prefixed to the reprint of *Joseph and his Brethren* was a re-cast of a sketch written about 1861. His volume of poems, ultimately issued as *Songs of Two Nations*, was a reprinted collection of *A Song of Italy*, *Ode on the French Republic*, and *Dirae*. *Essays and Studies* was a collection of his principal prose monographs, to which he merely added a preface and sundry notes. *The*

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Devil's Due was a pseudonymous attack on Buchanan reprinted from the *Examiner*; *Auguste Vacquerie*, published in French in November of this year, was an improvised tribute of friendship. But Swinburne's real activity in 1875 was not perceived by the public. He was hard at work on a history of the metrical progress of Shakespeare. This "history" was never published in the form which Swinburne originally intended, that is to say, exclusively from the prosodical point of view. But he must be regarded as devoting the best of his leisure and the keenest of his penetration from this time until the publication of *A Study of Shakespeare* on a technical examination of the work of that poet. In a letter to me (Jan. 31, 1875) his purpose is clearly laid down:

> I am now at work on my long-designed essay or study on the metrical progress or development of Shakespeare as traceable by ear and *not* by finger, and the general changes of tone and stages of mind expressed or involved in this change or progress of style. I need hardly say that I begin with a massacre of the pedants worthy of celebration in an Icelandic saga,—"a murder grim and great." I leave the "finger-counters and finger-casters" without a finger to count on or an (ass's) ear to wag. Which do you think would be the best title for this essay —*The Three Stages of Shakespeare*, or *The Progress of Shakespeare*? If not (as I fear it is) too pretentious, the latter would perhaps be,—or sound,—best.

Two months later he puts the same question to Mr. John Morley, and ultimately neither title proved appropriate to his scheme. In March he says:

I am still engaged on the period where the influence of rhyme and the influence of Marlowe were fighting, or throwing dice, for the (dramatic) soul of Shakespeare. No one I believe has yet noted how long and hard the fight or the game was.

A first instalment of this work appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* for May 1875, but the harsh reception it met with from Shakespearean experts somewhat discouraged the author. However, in January 1876 Mr. John Morley published a second, in which Swinburne controverted the views that Spedding, after consultation with Tennyson, had put forward in 1850 regarding the date and authorship of *Henry VIII.* These views had been adopted by the New Shakspere Society, which Furnivall had lately founded. A ridiculous controversy ensued, in our regret at which it must never be forgotten that Furnivall struck the first blow. Swinburne replied in a public letter which was a declaration of war, and the contest went rumbling on for six or seven years. Its manifestations, however, did not become acute until 1880, and we may leave consideration of it for the moment.

In July, however, Swinburne turned from the exclusive contemplation of Shakespeare and his commentators to the production of a new poem. During a visit paid to Jowett at West Malvern, in that month, he sketched the plot of *Erechtheus* and wrote the first great chorus of the Athenian Elders. He finished the play in November, sent it immediately to press, and issued it soon after New Year's Day, 1876. It is interesting to contrast the smoothness of composition and

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the regularity with which the scenes of *Erechtheus* passed from Swinburne's pen, with the hesitations and innumerable false starts which delayed the progress of most of his earlier works, and were still delaying that of *Tristram*. This autumn he was in a very happy frame of mind, whether at Holmwood, or through a delightful September and October at Southwold, on the Suffolk coast, with Theodore Watts, and he was free from various pecuniary burdens and anxieties. It was an oasis in these rather desert years, and the influence of it may be felt in the technical perfection of *Erechtheus*. This is in several respects the most organic of Swinburne's writings, though it may never have been found by the general reader the most interesting; while it can scarcely be denied that in the general conduct of this tragedy he rises, in an altitude of moral emotion that he reaches nowhere else, to an atmosphere which few modern poets have even attempted to breathe.

The theme of this drama is of the quintessence of tragedy, and the tale is rapidly conducted on a very high plane of heroic human virtue. It combines a tender and thrilling treatment of emotion with an appeal to civic patriotism in the truest spirit of antiquity. It is the most Greek of all the compositions of Swinburne, because it follows, with the greatest success, closely and yet vividly, the exact classical models. It is not merely Greek, but it is passionately Athenian, and Athens is considered, not as a theme for antiquarian curiosity, but as the living symbol of the virtue of citizenship. Swinburne was never

tired of reciting, like a thrush singing Greek, and with gestures of ecstasy, the odes in praise of Athenian liberty which break up the scenes of the *Persae*. The state of Athens in the fifth century B.C. appeared to him to approach his ideal Republic more nearly than any other ancient or modern institution. *Erechtheus* may in this respect be considered in relation with the ode entitled "Athens," written by Swinburne in 1881, although the latter is somewhat marred by the faults of verbosity and vociferation, which had during those years grown upon him. But in ode and drama alike, as well as elsewhere in Swinburne's writings, there is full evidence of the enthusiasm with which he hailed the Athenian polity as the finest example in the world's history of the ideal commonwealth—

> The fruitful, immortal, anointed, adored
> Dear city of men without master or lord,
> Fair fortress and fostress of sons born free.

"I praise the gods for Athens," Swinburne said all his life.

The Erechtheum, as we may read in Pausanias, was one of the most sacred places in Athens. It stood on the Acropolis, and its salient portion was the temple of Athene Polias, with three altars, one of which was dedicated to Poseidon and Erechtheus. This latter gives name to Swinburne's drama. He was a king of Attica in legendary times, descended from a still more mythical monarch, who was the son of Earth. Hence the autochthonous origin of the family, a reference to which is essential to our compre-

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hension of the story. Athens was attacked by the Thracians and hard pressed, when an oracle said that the only salvation possible for the city was the sacrifice of Chthonia, the daughter of the king who had sprung from the soil itself. Erechtheus takes a less prominent part in the play than his Queen Praxithea and their virginal victim. The noble endurance of the Mother and the delicate devotion of Chthonia are contrasted with a grace and pathos which are above praise. Events move rapidly; the innocent blood is poured forth, and "the holiness of Athens" is redeemed; but Erechtheus himself is slain by lightning at the moment of victory, and the sisters of Chthonia decline to survive her. The august figure of the stricken Praxithea stands alone on the stage for a moment, till Pallas Athena herself descends and embraces all Athens in a healing benediction. *Erechtheus* is less romantic and purer in its Hellenism than *Atalanta in Calydon*, but the stern outlines of its emotion are richly adorned by the lyrics of a chorus of Athenian Elders, of which the most celebrated is that which describes with inimitable *brio* the mythical rape of Chthonia's elder sister Oreithyia by Boreas. These choruses display to the full the poet's gift of splendour, and they present as well a reserve and purity of language, a cool beauty which he more rarely attains.

Swinburne's hatred of Euripides was never expressed more violently than when he was writing *Erechtheus*, perhaps because he was unable to forget that he was using a theme which had already passed through the hands of Euripides.

Indeed, he was not merely fully aware of, but grudgingly consented to adopt the argument saved for us by the orator Lycurgus and the long fragment, a speech of Praxithea, which are enough to give us some inkling of Euripides' treatment. A clumsy reviewer described Swinburne's play as "a translation from Euripides," ignorant of the fact that the supposed original disappeared, save for the bit preserved by Lycurgus, before the Christian era. Swinburne was too furious to see how funny this blunder was, but it provoked from him a private protest of great importance. In a letter to a friend (January 2, 1876) he said:

> A fourth-form boy could see that as far as *Erechtheus* can be said to be modelled after anybody, it is modelled throughout after the earliest style of Æschylus. . . . I *did* introduce (instead of a hint and a verse or two acknowledged in my notes) a good deal of the "long and noble fragment" referred to, into Praxithea's first long speech—but the translated verses (I must say it) were so palpably and pitiably inferior both in thought and expression to the rest that the first persons I read that part of the play to in MS., knowing nothing of Greek, . . . remarked the falling off at once—the discrepancy and blot on the face of my work—so I excised the Sophist— . . . only keeping a hint or two, and one or two of his best lines. If this sounds *outrecuidant* or savouring of "surquedry," you may remember that I always have maintained it is far easier to overtop Euripides by the head and shoulder than to come up to the waist of Sophocles or the knee of Æschylus.

He preserved this prejudice against Euripides from school-time to the grave, and he always asserted that he was supported in it by the conversation of Jowett. Neither the stoicism

nor the scepticism of Euripides was agreeable to Swinburne, and what did not please him excessively he was apt to reject altogether. He detested the realism of "the Sophist," but perhaps a few Euripidean touches would have preserved *Erechtheus* from what is really its only blemish, a too marmoreal uniformity of diction.

During the next three years there is hardly anything to record of the external life of the poet. He became more and more isolated from human companionship, and more and more buried in books. This was the most painful portion of his career, during which he suffered from alternations of boisterous excitement, which his few faithful friends were unable to repress, and of dark melancholia which they were powerless to dispel. Hitherto his visits to Holmwood had always enabled him to regain the serenity of his spirits, but this resource also now began to fail him. It was from Holmwood that he wrote to a friend (March 27, 1876) of "the dull monotonous puppet-show of my life, which often strikes me as too barren of action or enjoyment to be much worth holding on to." The great excitements of literature, which had supported him at such an altitude for so long, now seemed to lose their stimulus; he could speak of the spiritual pleasure of verse as only "better than nothingness, or at least seeming better than nothingness." His lyrical gift had not, however, failed him, though at this time it often took on a melancholy air, well presented by the sad and enchanting "Forsaken Garden," which was written in March 1876. He who, ten years

earlier, had entered with such generous enthusiasm into the hopes and efforts of his most stirring contemporaries, now cut himself off from all such companionships; "of the world of letters I know personally less than little," he wrote to an inquirer.

He stimulated his energies with controversy, and *A Note on the Muscovite Crusade* in prose and *A Ballad of Bulgarie* (the latter not printed till 1893) were contributions to a study of the Balkan War of 1876; the former disagreeable in tone, the latter a lively and amusing diatribe, showing great vivacity of mind and violence of temper; neither is of considerable value. Swinburne was now engaged in translating the poems of Villon, and in making a close study of that poet's text and language, by such lights as were at that date available. In May of this year he went with John Nichol to Guernsey and Sark, a memorable visit which gave him the extremity of pleasure. When he returned to London in June he appeared to have been dipped in the waters of Youth, so much had he regained of his vigour, his sweetness, and his cheerfulness.

The Channel Islands immediately inspired him with the old enthusiasm for the sea, and he now wrote "The Garden of Cymodoce" and other powerful lyrics in praise of Sark, "qui dépasse," he wrote to Stéphane Mallarmé (June 1, 1876), "même les éloges d'Auguste Vacquerie. Moi, nourri aux bords de la mer, je n'ai jamais rien vu de si charmant." He declared that he would be King of Sark. He became quite infatuated with the enchantment of this rocky islet, and

I have memories of embarrassing walks with him in the streets of London late at night, when *crescendo* praises of the glorious beauty of Sark, delivered at the top of his voice in a very shrill key, attracted the unfavourable attention of the police. But in August, after two months of London, he sank very low again. He attributed his loss of health and spirits to having been "poisoned by perfumes." A lady, at whose house he had spent a night, had, he said, sought to do him honour by filling his bedroom with great Japanese lilies in blossom, and the poet had waked in the middle of the night in a delirium, rousing the household with his shrieks. Whatever the cause, he was certainly extremely ill, and again a long retirement at Holmwood proved the remedy. He was seen no more in London until the spring of 1877.

On the 4th of March his father, Admiral Swinburne, died and was buried at Bonchurch beside the daughter whom he lost in 1863. As it was said at the time, and has been repeated, that Admiral Swinburne's Will contained reflections on his eldest son, which were painful to the poet's feelings and tended to estrange him from his family, it is perhaps well to say that these rumours were wholly unfounded. It is true that the Admiral named as executors his brother-in-law, Sir Henry Percy Gordon, and his younger son, Edward Swinburne (who died in 1891). But Algernon's notorious inaptitude for any species of business was quite sufficient to account for that. By the Will, which was signed in May 1875, the Admiral left Algernon £5000, and the

ultimate possession of his books, which he valued at £2000, so that if any difference at all was made between his children, it was a little to his eldest son's advantage. Algernon returned to Holmwood after the funeral, but for a very short time. He refrained from going back there any more, and when the summer of 1877 came round, he went to Southwold in Suffolk again, instead of going to Holmwood, and then returned to London. In November of the same year Lady Jane Swinburne told Messrs. Chatto and Windus, his publishers, that she did not know her son's address.

His principal occupation or diversion for some time had been a study on the character and writings of a novelist for whom he cultivated a deep devotion. On his return to London he completed his *Note on Charlotte Brontë*, a "note" which extended to a volume. The object of this work was controversial; it was intended to undermine the reputation of George Eliot, which was particularly obnoxious to Swinburne, by insistence on the superior claims of Charlotte Brontë, who was being unduly neglected. So far so well, and Swinburne deserves great credit for having set the pendulum swinging back in favour of the Brontës. Nor was his praise of Charlotte, though expressed in dithyrambic language, excessive. It sweeps away *The Professor* and pronounces *Shirley* essentially a failure, while basing the triumphant claim of Charlotte Brontë to eternal fame on *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*. Swinburne took the opportunity to celebrate the genius of Emily, and criticism

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has in the main accepted a view which he was the earliest to state with vigour. The *Note*, however, in spite of much that is amusing and valuable, is not a success. It marks a stage in the decline, or at least in the ossification, of Swinburne's genius. His firmness has become arrogance, his zeal violence, his *chiaro* a blaze and his *oscuro* pitch-darkness. There are offences against taste; he seriously grieved a number of his own friends by calling George Eliot "an Amazon thrown sprawling over the crupper of her spavined and spur-galled Pegasus." Indeed there is ample proof offered by the *Note* of 1877 that Swinburne at the age of forty had adopted mannerisms of style and temper which could not but injure his future writings in prose. If any one made this prediction at the time, it was only too sadly confirmed by the results of the next three decades.

At this time he lived in one very large sitting-room and a bedroom on the first floor of 3 Great James Street, Bedford Row, and here he had arranged his favourite possessions. Among these were a collection of precious glass, a wonderful mosaic-top table, a swinging pier-glass before which the poet would perform a sort of solemn dance, and the famous serpentine candlesticks. These objects were in curious discord with the rest of the lodging-house furniture. He was accustomed to draw the particular attention of visitors to each of them in turn, like a showman, saying of the table-top, "Great God, how beautiful it is!" or of the candlesticks, "Lovely! lovely!" with a strong indrawing of the breath.

Mr. W. Lestocq, the actor, who lived in the same house at this time, and who often was of use to him, recalls that he seldom entered Swinburne's sitting-room without the poet's calling his attention to the portrait of Orsini, the identical pastel or print which had adorned his rooms at Oxford, " and that frequently, though it hung much above his head, he would jump up and try to kiss it." He entertained his particular friends here rather frequently, but these feasts were apt to be agitating affairs. The following extract from my own journal may be taken to illustrate his life at this time :

June 11th, 1877. A. C. S. having summoned me to go to his rooms on Saturday evening for the particular purpose of hearing a new Essay he has written on Charlotte Brontë, I duly arrived at 3 Great James Street about 8. Algernon was standing alone in the middle of the floor, with one hand in the breast of his coat, and the other jerking at his side. He had an arrangement of chairs, with plates and glasses set on the table, as if for a party. He looked like a conjurer, who was waiting for his audience. He referred vaguely to " the others," and said that while they delayed in coming, he would read me a new poem he had just finished, called " In the Bay," which he said he should solemnly dedicate to the spirit of Marlowe. He brushed aside some of the glasses and plates, and sat down to read. The poem was very magnificent, but rather difficult to follow, and very long. It took some time to read ; and still no one came. As the evening was slipping away, I asked him presently whether the reading of C. Brontë should not begin, whereupon he answered, " I'm expecting Watts and Ned Burne-Jones and Philip Marston, and—some other men. I hope they'll come soon." We waited a little while in silence, in the twilight, and then Swinburne

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said, " I hope I didn't forget to ask them ! " He then trotted or glided into his bedroom, and what he referred to there I don't know, but almost instantly he came out and said cheerfully, " Ah ! I find I didn't ask any of those men, so we'll begin at once." He lighted his two great candlesticks of serpentine and started. He soon got tired of reading the Essay, and turned to the delights, of which he never wearies, of his unfinished novel. He read two long passages, the one a ride over a moorland by night, the other the death of his heroine, Lesbia Brandon. After reading aloud all these things with his amazing violence, he seemed quitè exhausted, and sank in a kind of dream into the corner of his broad sofa, his tiny feet pressed tight together, and I stole away.

He was very solitary at this time. His breakfast was served to him in his rooms, but he had to go out for his other meals, which he used to do with mechanical regularity. It was a curious spectacle to see him crossing Holborn on his way to the London Restaurant, which then existed at the corner of Chancery Lane. Swinburne, with hanging hands, and looking straight before him, would walk across like an automaton between the vans and cabs, and that he was never knocked down seemed extraordinary. Occasionally he took Watts or myself to dine with him, but seldom, and he never made any casual acquaintances. Mr. R. B. Haldane (now Lord Haldane) tells me that he happened to go into the London Restaurant one day in 1877. When he had given his order for luncheon, the waiter leaned down and whispered, " Do you see that gentleman, Sir ? " Haldane then perceived a little gentleman sitting bolt upright at a table by

himself, with nothing before him but a heaped-up dish of asparagus and a bowl of melted butter. His head, with a great shock of red hair round it, was bent a little on one side, and his eyes were raised in a sort of unconscious rapture, while he held the asparagus, stick by stick, above his face, and dropped it down as far as it would go. "That's the poet Swinburne, Sir!" the waiter said, "and he comes here on purpose to enjoy our asparagus."

In May 1878, Victor Hugo invited Swinburne to Paris, to be present as the official representative of English poetry, at the centenary of the death of Voltaire. But the letter arrived at a moment of suffering and depression, and Swinburne could not find a companion. A second invitation suggested that Swinburne should himself have a welcome in Paris, Mlle. Augusta Holmès having consented to put some of his poems to music for a public performance, at which Swinburne was to be crowned by an Academician. What the voice of Zeus could not perform was not likely to be wrought by a siren, and Swinburne abode wearily in 3 Great James Street.

The texture of his verse now showed greater elasticity and freshness than that of his prose. No one would have guessed at the distracted and even alarming physical condition of the author from the serene volume of *Poems and Ballads: Second Series* which he published in June 1878. Not a few of Swinburne's closest admirers would, indeed, sooner part with any other of his books than with this, which exhibits his purely lyrical genius in its most amiable and

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melodious form. It was dedicated to Richard Burton, in whose company and in that of Adelaide Sartoris the poet had spent some enchanting weeks at Vichy, in September 1869. He reminded his friends how

> Some nine years gone, as we dwelt together
> In the sweet hushed heat of the south French weather,
> Ere autumn fell on the vine-tressed hills
> Or the season had shed one rose-red feather,

while Swinburne and Burton stood together at the Grand Grille at Vichy, the poet pledged the traveller in a beaker of hot water, and promised that his next book of songs should bear the name of Burton :

> Nine years have risen and eight years set
> Since there by the well-spring our hands on it met :
> And the pledge of my songs that were then to be,
> I could wonder not, friend, though a friend should forget.
>
> For life's helm rocks to the windward and lee,
> And time is as wind, and as waves are we ;
> And song is as foam that the sea-winds fret,
> Though the thought at its heart should be deep as the sea.

The sentiment of friendship is very strongly marked in the volume of 1878, and is displayed in the successive elegies which distinguish it from other collections of the poet's work. Some of these have already been mentioned, but they deserve reconsideration. The poems on the deaths of Baudelaire, of Théophile Gautier, of Barry Cornwall, of Lorimer Graham (" Epicede "), of Admiral Swinburne (" Inferiae ") are amongst the most tender, the most sincere, and the most inspired which the author ever composed. More-

over, they combine with an elegiac accent of regret a formal and considered analysis of work and character. The three first of those just mentioned rank among Swinburne's most exquisite pieces of criticism, and the critical elegy may be said to be a form of verse which he practically invented.

But the *Poems and Ballads* of 1878 is also remarkable as containing a large number of pieces in which the melody of Swinburne's verse reached its highest refinement. There is not here a question of the torrent of palpitating and trumpeting music which fills the choruses and odes of earlier volumes, nor even of the Corybantic dance-measures of the poems of 1866, but of a delicate, tremulous melody like that of a nightingale, poured forth in a stream of pensive but not dejected enthusiasm. This witchery of exquisite sound, the tone of the Aeolian harp, had rarely been heard before in Swinburne's poetry, and was scarcely ever heard in it again. It is found here in its most harmonious ecstasy in such magical lyrics as "A Forsaken Garden," "The Year of the Rose," "A Ballade of Dreamland," and "A Vision of Spring in Winter."

Of "A Ballade of Dreamland" he told Miss Alice Bird that, going to his bedroom early one night, he sat down to write a poem with the refrain, "Only the song of a secret bird," but that to his astonishment and disgust the words would not come. He got into bed, savagely uttering imprecations. In the morning, when he awoke with rested brain, he wrote the ballade off without a halt. He described to her, also, the

circumstances in which "A Vision of Spring in Winter" was composed. He produced the three first stanzas in his sleep. "I was not dreaming," he declared, "nor in the borderland of sleep, but sound asleep," when the ideas were born. He woke in the night, and jumping out of bed, he scribbled the verses down. He expected in the morning to find that they were nonsense, but no alteration of the verses as he had written them was needed, and then he added the four concluding stanzas. In a totally different key, this volume presents to us what is perhaps the most powerful of all Swinburne's lyrics of experience, "At a Month's End"—which as a parallel between storm on the sea and passion in the soul has never been equalled.

This volume of 1878, which was remarkable, among other things, as containing the translations from François Villon on which Swinburne had been so long engaged, was originally destined to be dedicated to William Bell Scott. When the poet recalled his promise to Burton, he cancelled this dedication to Scott, which remains unpublished. It is called "Recollections," and contains some lines of great beauty. It opens thus :

> Years have sped from us under the sun,
> Through blossom and snow-tides twenty-one,
> Since first your hand as a friend's was mine,
> In a season whose days are yet honey and wine
> To the pale close lips of Remembrance, shed
> By the cupbearer Love for desire of the dead.

A great portion of this volume of 1878 was ready for the press at least two years earlier.

On the 10th of September 1876, when he spent a long day at my house, he read nearly half of what now forms that collection to my wife and myself.

On one of the last occasions when he went into general society, he met "in a crush" at Lord Houghton's a young Oxford man who asked his host to present him to Swinburne. This was Oscar Wilde, of whom Swinburne four years later (April 4, 1882) gave the following description to an American friend:

> I thought he seemed a harmless young nobody, and had no notion that he was the sort of man to play the mountebank as he seems to have been doing. A letter which he wrote to me lately about Walt Whitman was quite a modest, gentleman-like, reasonable affair without any flourish or affectation of any kind in matter or expression. It is really very odd. I should think you in America must be as tired of his name as we are in London of Mr. Barnum's and his Jumbo's.

Of Swinburne's life at the time little can be recorded, and less that is agreeable. In January 1878 he spent a boisterous month with John Nichol in Glasgow, where he published some political sonnets in a college magazine. Mr. Donald Crawford, who had not seen Swinburne since they were undergraduates together at Balliol, met him in Glasgow, and was pained at his physical condition; "the pleasant voice remained, but all the traits of fairyland were gone." The most gifted of Nichol's pupils, the unfortunate John Davidson, who was now an usher at Alexander's Charity, Glasgow, sent Swinburne some of his unpublished verses.

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Swinburne received him in Nichol's house with great affability, laying his hand upon Davidson's head in a sort of benediction, and addressing him as "Poet." My friend Mr. Alexander Hedderwick remembers Swinburne at this time "marching about the Quadrangle, very fashionably dressed, in a close-fitting long Melton coat of dark blue, and the neatest of little shoes, his top hat balanced on his great mop of hair, a marvel to our rough Glasgow students." From February 1877 to June 1879 he was in a state of constant febrility and ill-health in London, and permanently, if I remember right, in his rooms in Great James Street. He positively refused to go down to Holmwood at the summons of his mother, who wrote, in July 1878, that she had not seen him since April of the preceding year.

Lord Houghton found him in a sad condition, but not all the entreaties of his family would induce him to stir, or to permit them to visit him, until June 1879, when he was persuaded to spend a month at Holmwood. The succeeding months of August and September were the most deplorable in his whole career. When he seemed actually at the doors of death, Theodore Watts, with the approval of the distressed and bewildered Lady Jane Swinburne, arrived very early one morning and carried the poet by force to his own rooms, which were now close by. Thence, as soon as he was partially recovered, to Putney, where in an amazingly short space of time Swinburne regained his health so that he was soon once more writing with unabated vigour.

CHAPTER VIII

PUTNEY

(1879–1909)

In September 1879 Swinburne was removed, as has been said, in a state of health which seemed almost desperate, from Watts' rooms in Great James Street, to the upper storey of a semi-detached villa at Putney, which Theodore Watts now took for the purpose.[1] He was at first too ill to see any one or to write a letter, yet, such was his recuperative vitality, that by the middle of October he was once more able to resume his correspondence and his literary work, and to enjoy regular exercise out-of-doors. He wrote to Lord Houghton :

I keep no chambers in town henceforth, or (probably) for ever—finding after but too many years' trial that in the atmosphere of London I can never expect more than a fortnight at best of my usual health and strength. Here I am, like Mr. Tennyson at Farringford, "close to the edge of a noble down," and I might add "Far out of sight, sound, smell of the town," and yet within an easy hour's run of Hyde Park Corner and a pleasant drive of Chelsea, where I have some friends lingering.

[1] The lease was granted for twenty-one years, from the 18th of September 1879, to Walter Theodore Watts, "of Ivy Lodge, Werter Road, Putney," that being the residence of Watts' sister, Mrs. Mason.

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His prophecy was fulfilled; The Pines, Putney Hill, continued to be his address for the remainder of his life, that is for nearly thirty years. During this long period, Swinburne led an existence of the greatest calm, passivity, and resignation, without a struggle and apparently without a wish for liberty of action. He abandoned all attempt at initiative, in return for benefits of watchful care, assiduous protection, and a relief from every species of responsibility. His life was "sheltered" like that of a child, and he was able to concentrate his faculties upon literature and his dreams without a shadow of disturbance. "A child at play with his toys," an acute and indulgent observer of those days called him, "a child turning for comfort, self-forgetfulness, and consolation to poetry, itself, in a sense, a toy."

Watts undertook to relieve him of all business worries. Swinburne was not a lodger at The Pines, but joint-householder with Watts, and in theory all expenses were to be equally divided. The poet wrote to John Nichol: "My own little money matters have been getting into such an accursed tangle that unless Watts had once more taken them in hand I should ere now" (the winter of 1879) "have found my assets reduced to what the old Enemy calls 'Zero, or even a frightful *minus* quantity.'" Swinburne was easily annoyed by business letters, the receipt of which made him quiver with irritation. For the remainder of his life he handed such unpleasant objects to his friend, without glancing at them. An exception must be noted in his correspondence about the publication of his books, which he

always insisted on conducting with Mr. Andrew Chatto himself.

His days were divided with an almost mechanical precision. Swinburne was never an early riser, but towards the middle of every morning, no matter what the weather, he went out for a long walk, generally in the one direction up Putney Hill and over the Heath, but sometimes along the Richmond Road to the Mortlake Arms and then through Barnes Common as far as Barnes Green and the Church. For many years he was a constant visitor at the shop of the Misses Frost, at the corner of Ridgeway and High Street, going into Wimbledon; from these ladies he regularly bought his newspapers and ordered his books, and their house was the bourne of his walk in a southerly direction. Very seldom he crossed the river northwards into London.

In storm and rain, always without an umbrella, the little erect figure, with damp red curls emerging from under a soft felt hat, might be seen walking, walking, "pelting along all the time as fast as I can go," so that he became a portent and a legend throughout the confines of Wandsworth and Wimbledon. He always returned home a little while before the midday luncheon, or dinner; and at 2.30, with clockwork regularity, he "disappeared to enjoy a siesta," which sometimes lasted until 4.30. Then he would work for a while; and Watts-Dunton reported to Mr. Wise that in the afternoon he often sat in his study on the ground floor, and "heard Swinburne in his own room overhead walking round and round the floor for ten minutes

at a time, composing, and then silence would fall for five minutes while Swinburne was writing down the new stanza or sentence, and then the promenade would begin again as before." The rest of the day was mostly spent among his books, which were not only numerous, but included many that were choice and rare.

In the evening his regular habit was to read aloud. It is perhaps worth mentioning that Swinburne was an insatiable and continuous novel-reader. He was so fond of Dickens that he read through the whole of his novels every three years, and Watts-Dunton used to declare that Swinburne had read them aloud to him "at least three times." This was his favourite reading, but he could, and did, read anything in the shape of a novel which the circulating library supplied. His casual remarks about novels were often piquant, and familiar. I remember that he dismissed *Guy Deverell* as "too hasty, too blurred and blottesque," and said of *Uncle Silas* that the hero "would be more ghastly if he were less ghostly." He took a vivid interest in the novels of his young kinsman, Mr. Richard Bagot, and particularly in the earliest, *A Roman Mystery*, where the study of lycanthropy attracted him.

He explained to me once that he did not regard current novels as literature but as life, and that in his absolutely detached existence they took the place of real adventures. In these conditions his health became perfect; he developed into a sturdy little old man, without an ache or a pain; and he who had suffered so long in London from absence of appetite and wasting insomnia, for

the last thirty years of his life at Putney ate like a caterpillar and slept like a dormouse.

Since many months the First Act of the third play of the Queen Mary trilogy had been written, and even set up in type. But there was no more of it in existence when the poet retired to Putney. As soon as he felt his strength return, he took up again this MS. and wrote some of the Walsingham scenes, but he was not attuned to the subject, and laid it down again. *Mary Stuart* progressed by fits and starts, and was not completed until 1881. At Christmas 1879 Swinburne was feverishly engaged in completing his long-promised prose book, *A Study of Shakespeare*, which appeared early in the following year. His articles in the *Fortnightly Review* had in 1875 procured Swinburne the friendship of Halliwell-Phillipps, who supplied him with documents and volumes which considerably modified, and perhaps disturbed, the views he had hitherto expressed regarding the imaginative development of Shakespeare's mind. But Halliwell-Phillipps warmly supported Swinburne's general criticism, and he was the most prominent and outspoken of the few Shakespearean experts who now took Swinburne's side in the great battle with Furnivall.

We have already noted that relations between the poet and the official representative of Shakespearean criticism were strained as early as the end of 1875. But the breach between Furnivall and Swinburne was not final until January 1880, when the storm at last broke out in full fury. Furnivall now lost all self-command, and wrote of "Mr. Swinburne's shallow ignorance and

infinite self-conceit." He told him "to teach his grandmother to suck eggs"; he told him that his ear was "a poetaster's, hairy, thick and dull." Presently Furnivall took to parodying Swinburne's name, with dismal vulgarity, as "Pigsbrook" (to which injury the poet archly retorted by dubbing Furnivall "Brothelsdyke"); and he assailed the poet's private friends with insolent post-cards to the poet's disadvantage. He brought down upon himself the reproof of Halliwell-Phillipps, and of another of the most eminent of his own supporters, Aldis Wright, who told Furnivall that he was behaving "like an angry monkey." A large number of the influential members of the New Shakspere Society expostulated with Furnivall in a signed protest. He struck all the names of these signatories out of the list of members, and sent them a printed letter (April 25, 1881), telling them—they included the seventh Duke of Devonshire, Jebb, and Creighton—"I am glad to be rid of you." His behaviour, in short, was that of a man demented, though we may conjecture that he was not quite so angry as it amused him to pretend to be.

Swinburne, however, was scarcely less to blame, except that he spoke only for himself, and had no duty to a body of subscribers. But it is obvious that, when Furnivall began to be rude, Swinburne should have withdrawn severely from the controversy. Instead of doing that, he exercised his ingenuity in infuriating his antagonist. He had a diabolical cleverness in tormenting Furnivall, and he knew how to hint the exact charge which would excite that unfortunate

man to frenzy. Swinburne would ask his friends, as I well remember, whether such "a flagellant note"—which he would read in MS. to us, spluttering with ecstasy as he did so—would not make "Dunce Furnivall dance till the sweat pours down his cheeks"? He used to say that at each fresh sample of unprovoked impertinence all the French and Irish particles of his blood tingled with an instinct answering to that of Bussy d'Amboise or Sir Lucius O'Trigger.

He took nothing seriously until Browning accepted the presidency of the New Shakspere Society. That did shake Swinburne's complacency, and he wrote calling upon me to sympathise with him in his rage at "Browning's having disgraced himself for life by his acceptance of the presidency of a blackguard's gang of blockheads." More slinging of mud went on, until everybody began to be sick of the subject, and newspaper editors declined to insert any more letters on either side. Furnivall kept up for some time, by halfpenny post, a running fire of scurrilities, and then the grotesque warfare came to a sullen end. But, to the close of his life, to speak to Swinburne of "pause-tests" and "rhyme-tests" was like calling out "Rats!" to a terrier.[1]

Swinburne now occupied himself in preparing for the press a volume which appeared anonymously towards the beginning of 1880, and considerably mystified the reading world. This was *The Heptalogia; or, the Seven against Sense,*

[1] Swinburne's occasional contributions to this controversy were first collected in 1912, by Mr. T. J. Wise, in his privately printed *Letters to the Press, by Algernon Charles Swinburne.*

including parodies of Tennyson, Robert and Elizabeth Browning, Coventry Patmore, Robert Lord Lytton, Rossetti and Swinburne himself. On this delightful fool's cap few of the bells were recent. The imitation of Patmore had been made as early as 1859, and those of the Brownings in 1863–64, for the amusement of the Pre-Raphaelite circle of that day; the Tennyson was written in 1877. The Rossetti sonnet is probably much earlier. It was at Theodore Watts' suggestion that Swinburne now added "Nephelidia," which is a parody of his own most alliterative and redundant poetry, so that by a laugh against himself he might make pleasantly innocuous the satire on the others. There exists in MS. another fragmentary parody by Swinburne of himself, in the measure of "Dolores."

As a matter of fact, the caricatures are quite inoffensive, except the "Last Words of a Seventh-Rate Poet," in which the idiosyncrasies of the second Lord Lytton are virulently dealt with. The writer, whose pen-name was "Owen Meredith," was at that time Viceroy of India, but he shortly afterwards returned, and Lord Houghton entertained him at a small luncheon, to which Swinburne and Watts were bidden. Lord Houghton's intention, no doubt, was to bring about a reconciliation, but the quarrel being a purely abstract one and Swinburne extremely deaf, it was not until he left Houghton's house that he learned that he had been in a room with his pet aversion.

The Heptalogia, the dates of composition of which have never before, I believe, been stated, deserves particular attention, because it is, in the

main, a work of Swinburne's prime. We have seen that the parodies on the two Brownings, and especially "The Poet and the Woodlouse," belong to the period of his highest intellectual vigour. He told R. W. Raper, with exultant humour, that he (Algernon) could parody Robert Browning's discords with impunity, since Browning could never revenge himself by parodying his harmonies. The imitation of Mrs. Browning is perhaps the very best parody in existence, because it does not merely reproduce the material form and the verbiage of a mannered writer, but it enters into her very brain. Thus, and not otherwise, would Mrs. Browning have expressed herself if she had been the victim of a sunstroke or intoxicated with ether:

I am fed with intimations, I am clothed with consequences,
And the air I breathe is coloured with apocalyptic blush;
Ripest-budded odours blossom out of dim chaotic stenches,
And the Soul plants spirit-lilies in sick leagues of human slush,

shouts the Woodlouse, and if the hand is the hand of Algernon, the voice is unquestionably the authentic voice of Elizabeth.

In the course of January 1880 Swinburne published a volume of lyrical verse entitled *Songs of the Springtides*. This consisted of three long odes, and a supplementary celebration of Victor Hugo's seventy-eighth birthday. "Thalassius" is the vaguely autobiographical story of a poet, whose father is the sun and his mother the sea, and who has been found, as a laughing babe, on a reach of shingle upon some unnamed coast.

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"On the Cliffs" is a eulogy of the genius of Sappho, expressed in terms of hyperbole; translations of the best-remembered fragments of the Lesbian are introduced in mosaic. "The Garden of Cymodoce," which has already been mentioned, is a glorification of the beauties of the island of Sark. The finest page in "Thalassius," perhaps in the volume, is that describing the bull-voiced mimes bellowing below the throne of Nero. The two first odes are irregular, but in "The Garden of Cymodoce" a number of stanzaic forms are used, and there is a chorus about the sea-anemones of Sark, where

> No foot but the sea-mew's there settles
> On the spikes of thine anthers like horns,
> With snow-coloured spray for thy petals,
> Black rocks for thy thorns.

Unfortunately, clever as this is, it reads like a parody out of *The Heptalogia*. The "Birthday Ode for Victor Hugo" is a sort of critical puzzle, explained by a dated key at the end. The author, as if for a wager, contrives to allude in succession to every one of Victor Hugo's writings, without naming any. It might be recommended as a fireside game in a cultured family to read Swinburne's descriptions and guess what work of Hugo's each refers to. For instance, on hearing the words,

> As keen the blast of love-enkindled fate
> That burst the Paduan tyrant's guarded gate,

a bright child would shout *Angelo*!

Throughout this year 1880 Swinburne was writing indomitably, both in prose and verse.

The poems contained in the volume called *Studies in Song* were all composed between February and August. Watts was responsible for the effort Swinburne was now making to write descriptive or landscape poetry; he urged the poet to devote himself during their summer holidays more to positive observation and less to abstract passion. Of "By the North Sea," which was finished in July 1880, Swinburne wrote, "Watts likes it better than anything I ever did, and in metrical and antiphonal effect I prefer it myself to all my others"; yet this poem is but an imitation of the "Epilogue" of 1866. The composition of enormous critical odes, that section of all his writings which is probably the least read, had now become a habit with Swinburne. All this year he was plunged once more in the study of Landor, and perhaps to excess, for the *Song for the Centenary of Landor* is one of the most tiresome of all his works. It is only right, however, to display his own attitude to it. He wrote to me (July 5, 1880) of this poem:

> Come soon and hear it. . . . It sums up what I have to say of my great old friend on all accounts whether critical or personal—and I know how much he would have preferred to have it said in verse, the best that I could command which I have certainly done all I can to give him, and to make as worthy of him as may be—wishing earnestly that it were nearer that inaccessible mark of worthiness. But the limit of eight hundred lines is pitifully narrow for such a Titanic charge as the panegyric of such a Titan.

These are generous words, and yet even in the looseness of their arrangement they betray a

growing and a fatal weakness. The sense of proportion had always been capricious in Swinburne's constitution; it was now leaving him altogether, and the power of logical expression was accompanying it. In his determination to do honour to Landor, he omitted to ask himself whether an extremely allusive and obscure piece of versified rhetoric in 800 lines was a practical means of concentrating attention on the object, and he poured forth stanzas in which great lines were frequent and luminous passages occasional, but the total effect of which was merely foggy and fatiguing.

The faults into which he had slipped were not unobserved by the reviewers and the public. *Songs of the Springtides* met with a lukewarm, and *Studies in Song* with a very cold, reception. The poet was greatly disappointed, and in a letter to a friend he wrote that he had become, like Imogen, a castaway: "Poor I am stale, a garment out of fashion"; but he failed to appreciate the cause of the decline in his popularity.

The very quiet year 1881 slipped by at Putney almost without an incident. For some time past Swinburne had been afflicted by a growing deafness, a malady to which, I understand, the members of his family are liable. After the crisis in his health, this hardness of hearing became more serious, and it gradually closed general society to him. His principal business in 1881 was the continuation of *Mary Stuart*, in which he completed the trilogy of which *Chastelard* and *Bothwell* had been parts. This drama was published before Christmas, and Swinburne also

contributed to the *Fortnightly Review* a prose Note on the Character of Queen Mary. The play has the negative merit of brevity, in comparison at least with *Bothwell*, but it is much less interesting. Possibly the poet now knew too much of his subject and was hampered at every turn by too accurate information. Swinburne was disappointed at the coldness of the critics and at the indifference of the public. Two things, however, consoled him, a letter from the venerable author of *Philip van Artevelde*, "the one English poet living for whose opinion as an authority on poetic drama I care a cracked farthing"—and an invitation from the editor of the new edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* to write the article on Mary Queen of Scots. But for us the best outcome of all was the set of seven "Adieux à Marie Stuart," in which Swinburne regained for a moment all his pristine freshness and charm. These lyrics, indeed, have the melancholy interest of being perhaps the very latest in which he revealed a new aspect of his poetical genius.

The Historiographer-Royal for Scotland, Professor P. Hume Brown, has been so kind as to oblige me with the following estimate of Swinburne's contributions to the study of Queen Mary:

> It was the opinion of Goethe that "for the poet no characters are historical," and he exemplified it in transforming the Egmont of history, a man of mature years and the father of eleven children, into an irresponsible youth unfettered by family ties. If we may judge from Swinburne's three dramas devoted to the

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fortunes of Mary Stuart, he held stricter views than Goethe regarding the poet's licence in dealing with historical events and historical characters. Nowhere in these plays does he seriously deviate from the facts of history as they are known to us. He puts his own construction on the motives and aims of the historical personages who appear on his stage, and on the causal connection of the events in which they are concerned, but his construction is based on satisfactory evidence. The plays in themselves and the article on Mary contributed by Swinburne to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, indeed, leave us in no doubt that he had not only carefully studied the facts immediately bearing on the fate of Mary, but by wide reading in the contemporary literature had steeped himself in the atmosphere of the period in which his characters lived and moved. In his selection of events, their sequence, and connection he appears to have generally followed Froude. This is notably the case in the last of the three dramas; in all the five acts that compose it the speeches of the different characters are for the most part based on the text of Froude. In the main, also, Swinburne's conception of Mary's character is the same as Froude's—though with a difference. For both, craft and passion are the dominating traits of her nature, and both equally recognise the qualities wherein lay her personal charm. But while Froude's narrative makes prominent the bad that he saw in her, Swinburne presents her character as a whole, and exhibits her good and evil qualities in equal relief. Yet it is evident that there was one action of Mary which, perhaps characteristically, Swinburne could not forgive—her consenting to the execution of Chastelard. The tragic suggestion in all the three dramas, indeed, is that Mary's misfortunes, ending in her doom at Fotheringay, are the nemesis consequent on that action, and it is the part of Mary Beaton, between whom and Chastelard's love Mary had fatally intervened, to keep the fact before the mind of the reader. The last words

of the trilogy, uttered by Mary Beaton, link the fate of Chastelard with that of her who betrayed him :

> I heard that very cry go up
> Far off long since to God, who answers here.

Swinburne was now approaching a critical point in his career. The reception of his three latest volumes of verse by the reviewers and by the public had shown that through repetition of effect, or through a flagging of his natural vivacity, he had lost to a serious degree that power of exciting curiosity and stimulating discussion which had so pre-eminently attended his publications fifteen years earlier. Every poet of a large ambition desires to produce one poem on a scale which shall demand permanent and universal attention. Browning had achieved a great success with *The Ring and the Book*, and it was at that time, about 1868, that Swinburne resolved to ensphere all that was most glowing in his own imagination in one rounded epic poem. From a very early date the story of Tristan de Léonois (or Tristram of Lyonesse), son of the sister of Mark, King of Cornwall, had attracted him ; it was the subject of his earliest published verses, contributed to an Oxford magazine in 1858 ; still further back, according to his later report, that romantic lover had been his " close and common friend " at Eton. There is evidence to show that from school-time onwards Swinburne never ceased to propose to himself the writing of an epic on the story of Tristram.

There were many reasons for his deliberate adoption of the legend woven in the eleventh

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century around the notion of how Iseult and Tristram drank the magic potion intended for Iseult and her husband. This romance, of which there survive many mediaeval versions, was created by the Celtic spirit, accompanied on "la harpe Bretonne." It possesses a charm of mystery and passion which lifts it far above all other purely mediaeval legends. It was preserved and arranged by Frenchmen—it is the Anglo-Norman version of Thomas of Brittany, which represents it best,—but in the intense quality of its melancholy emotion it is essentially Celtic. Here was a story of love and adventure, celebrated over the whole world of Europe, at the centre of it an associate of our great national heroes of the Round Table, the scene of it laid in British waters, a story told centuries ago in an English version which is lost. Matthew Arnold had touched it, but it still awaited an annexing poet.

Love in its romantic aspect had a perennial attraction for Swinburne, and the tale of Tristram and Iseult was romantic to extravagance. In all the other great stories of the world love had been an appanage or an ornament; in this, for the first time, and in the quivering Celtic abandonment, it was the essence of the event. Moreover, that ecstatic devotion to and observation of the various moods of the sea which so remarkably distinguished Swinburne above all other poets found its full scope in the story of the sailing of the *Swallow* across the perilous Cornish waters. Gaston Paris has exclaimed in examining the Tristram saga, "quelle part elle prend à l'action, cette mer immense et incertaine!" In the days of Swin-

burne's youth, when he associated closely with Rossetti, Morris, and Burne-Jones, the legend of Tristram and Iseult was often discussed, and it was tacitly admitted to be predestined to extended treatment by Swinburne.

After long meditation, he began his epic in 1871, as soon as *Songs before Sunrise* was off his hands, and he wrote the Prelude, in 258 lines, in a tumult of improvisation. This he immediately published in a holiday-book called *Pleasure*. Then the breeze of inspiration fell, and for a long time he wrote no more, absorbed in *Bothwell* and in other things. But he never abandoned his intention, and during the eleven years which followed, he was every now and then composing what he called "parcels of *Tristram*." But it was not until 1881 that he took it vigorously in hand, and in the following April he finished it. It was published in July 1882, in an unfortunate form. The one epic of a great poet should, of course, have made its undistracted appeal to the public in a single, handsome volume, but there was great alarm in Putney as to the reception of a poem so amatory in tone. Watts, though he regarded *Tristram* as Swinburne's highest poetical effort, feared a repetition of the scandal of 1866, and fancied that the second and fourth cantos might be challenged by the Public Prosecutor. To modify the dreaded effect of these passages, a very thick book was produced, in which *Tristram* was eked out and half concealed by nearly 200 pages of miscellaneous lyrics. Swinburne, who submitted to everything that Watts suggested, acquiesced in this arrange-

ment, but took a humorous view of it. He told Lord Houghton (June 6, 1882) that he should "expect the Mothers of England to rally round a book containing forty-five 'songs of innocence'—lyrics on infancy and childhood." But there proved to be no cause for anxiety. The amatory complexion of *Tristram* was not objected to by anybody. What was objected to in the poem, alas! was its lack of vital interest.

It requires some care to define the cause of the comparative failure of *Tristram of Lyonesse*, the work on which Swinburne had been engaged from his thirty-fourth to his forty-sixth year, and which he had intended to be the very top-stone of his poetical monument. The subject seemed to suit him. He had always studied with interest the tragic symptoms of a culpable love, the passion of guilty lovers lifted by their ecstasy into a condition where their moral sense was paralysed, and where greatness could only be achieved by their apprehensions, sufferings and long-drawn deaths. He had entered with high intelligence into the intensely mediaeval characteristics of the legend. After the drink, the old French version makes the lovers say, "C'est notre mort que nous y avons bue," and Swinburne exactly responds to this keynote of the poem when he says, "all their life changed in them, for they quaffed Death." But as we read the poem, we become more and more persuaded that the story was ill-fitted in any modern hands for epical treatment, being essentially lyrical, while story-telling was the weakest side of Swinburne's multiform talent. There

is a total want of energy in the narrative of *Tristram*; there are no exploits, no feats of arms; the reader, avid for action, is put off with pages upon pages of amorous hyperbolical conversation between lovers, who howl in melodious couplets to the accompaniment of winds and waves.

It is perhaps the uniformity of effort in the texture of *Tristram* which produces a sense of fatigue. The Prelude — composed, as we have seen, so early as 1871—is a magnificent performance. Written, like the whole poem, in heroic couplets, it is as learned and brilliant a piece of studied versification as we meet with in the whole of English literature. The taste for this particular kind of verse may rise or fall, it may be now in the fashion or now out of it, but nothing can permanently oust the 'Prelude' to *Tristram* from its position at the very forefront of poetical accomplishment. In what he sets forth to do, Swinburne's achievement here can only be compared with that of Shelley in *Epipsychidion*, which as a metrical feat the 'Prelude' surpasses. For sustained splendour of language the zodiac of amorous constellations, each with its feminine star (ll. 101-156), is unequalled. Again, at the close of the last canto, the final scene of the dying Tristram, perplexed with the juggle of the white sail and the black, is admirably told, and the closing lines are very striking. But between these extremities, and relieved by marvellous maritime effects, there are long stretches of monotony caused by strain and effort to make every passage a purple one. The poem is

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less a story than a homily on the theme that Love is

> So strong that heaven, could Love bid heaven farewell,
> Would turn to fruitless and unflowering hell;
> So sweet that hell, to hell could love be given,
> Would turn to splendid and sonorous heaven,—

a theme that Dryden himself could not illustrate in the redundancy of an epic.

When *Tristram of Lyonesse* was off his hands, Swinburne was taken by Watts for a rather lengthy visit to Guernsey and Sark, which greatly benefited his health, although he quaintly complained to Mrs. Lynn Linton of the Puritanical restraints of the former; "Sunday in Guernsey," he wrote to her, "is to a Scotch Sabbath what a Scotch Sabbath is to a Parisian Sunday." On the other hand, he was more than ever bewitched by the wonders of the island of Cymodoce. He occupied a great deal of his time in bathing in the sea, and this afterwards led to a ridiculous imbroglio, of which I am sorry to say that I was the innocent cause. I happened to tell the extraordinary old R. H. Horne—"Orion" Horne—of Swinburne's feats of swimming, whereupon Horne, who was in his eightieth year, must needs, without warning me, write Swinburne a challenge to a public contest in natation. The peculiar funniness of Horne did not appeal to Swinburne's sense of humour, and he was very angry. "Orion" proposed the Westminster Aquarium as the scene of the race, and offered to share the proceeds with Swinburne!

In the autumn of 1882 Swinburne was invited

by Victor Hugo to come over to Paris and be present at the fiftieth anniversary of the first (and sole previous) representation of *Le Roi s'amuse*. The friends started, and put up at an hotel in the Rue Saint-Honoré. In later years, it was a legend at Putney that this had been a very wonderful occasion, but as a matter of fact it was rather a warning to the poet to try no more such adventures. Swinburne, very rightly, would accept no attention which was not shared with Watts, and Watts was unknown in Paris. Watts had not realised what a royal position Victor Hugo occupied, nor to what a degree he was surrounded by idolaters. Swinburne must have known it quite well; he had helped to set Victor Hugo on the throne, and he would recollect the *envoi* of Théodore de Banville's ballade:

> Gautier parmi ces joailliers
> Est prince, et Leconte de Lisle
> Forge l'or dans ses ateliers;
> Mais le père est là-bas, dans l'île.

It is certain that the English visitors found themselves "out of it" in the press of adulation. On the 22nd of November, the great night, they were indeed presented to the super-man for a moment, but in such a whirl of social excitement that they were hardly sure that Hugo realised who Swinburne was, and they saw him no more.

Watts reported at the time that Swinburne "was disappointed with both the poet and the play"; this is incredible, but he may have been annoyed at not seeing more of the deity. I received a letter from Swinburne while he was in Paris, in which he spoke of the play and of the occasion, but

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did not mention Victor Hugo. Moreover, his deafness made it impossible to follow the piece. This was the last occasion on which he left the shores of England. In this year he received a visit from James Russell Lowell, who had attacked Swinburne's early poems with strange vehemence. But he now made himself "very pleasant," and the old quarrel was healed.

After a considerable interval, during which he refrained from writing verse, largely because he felt that his excessive fluency had been carrying him too loosely on a wild prosodical gallop, he returned to poetry in the month of January 1883. He determined, for the sake of self-discipline, to abandon for a time his broad and sweeping measures, and to curb his Pegasus with a rigidly-determined fixed form. He chose the rondeau, that metrical structure in eleven lines, knit together by two rhymes, and with a refrain thrice repeated, the laws of which were laid down by Clément Marot in the sixteenth century. Swinburne anglicised the word, and called his little poems "roundels," which, however, was not fortunate, because another and still earlier form of verse, which is quite distinct, bears the name of "rondel." The essential laws which govern the construction of the rondeau admit a very considerable elasticity within their circle, and Swinburne showed a marvellous aptitude in combining variety with an exact observance of the essential laws. He composed one hundred of those little poems, which he published in a small quarto, dedicated to his old and beloved friend Christina Rossetti, in the spring of 1883.

The roundels were largely, though much less universally than has been said in haste, concerned with the praise of babes, since Swinburne's passion for infancy was now at its height; but they really formed a garland of delicate records of meditation, stored up through many years, and now first enshrined in metrical form.

To Swinburne's unsurpassed *maestria*, the strict laws of the rondeau offered no cause of delay. He composed *A Century of Roundels* with extraordinary swiftness and ease. He began the collection in the middle of January 1883; by the 6th of February he had finished twenty, four more by the 9th, and three more on the following day. All were completed before the end of March. The original MSS., written on half-sheets of note-paper, were sent as they were, red-hot, to the printers, and, when returned from the press, were presented to Miss Isabel Swinburne. They bear very little mark of correction, and may be considered as almost improvisations. The final *envoi* gives an impression of the daintiness and spontaneity of this very charming book:

> Fly, white butterflies, out to sea,
> Frail pale wings for the wind to try,
> Small white wings that we scarce can see,
> Fly.
> Here and there may a chance-caught eye
> Note in a score of you twain or three
> Brighter or darker of tinge or dye.
>
> Some fly light as a laugh of glee,
> Some fly soft as a low long sigh:
> All to the haven where each would be
> Fly.

The happy and shrouded remainder of Swinburne's life is summed up in the titles of his books. Without anxieties or duties of any kind, his energy concentrated itself on literature, and he became the book-monk of a suburban Thebais. All the charming part of his character blossomed forth anew, his gallantry, his tenderness, his loyalty. The caprices and irritabilities which had marred the surface of his nature disappeared. Yet there were disadvantages. He became less amusing and stimulating, although perhaps more lovable, than he had been in his tumultuous youth; and it would be sacrificing too much at the mere altar of virtue were we to pretend that he did not, as a figure, lose much of his significance. The temperament of Watts, which was more practical and vigorous than his own, exercised an unceasing well-meant pressure upon Swinburne, so that the poet grew to be little more than the beautiful ghost of what he had been in earlier years. As his own power of asserting himself decayed, or retired within concealed channels, it was inevitable that the weight, the opinions and the force of Watts should more and more take its place. Swinburne grew to live in, by and through Watts, till at length his own will existed only in certain streams of literary reflection, while even these were narrowed by the unconscious compulsion asserted by the domination of his companion.

The record of Swinburne's further publications will necessarily be brief, since they hardly concern the biographer, however interesting they must be to the critic. In 1883 he paid a memorable

visit to Jowett at Emerald Bank, Newlands, near Keswick. *A Midsummer Holiday* (1884) is a collection of lyrics, a considerable number being ballades of pure landscape description, a task imposed now upon him by Watts. At the close of this volume an odd freak of temper is revealed. Some foolish journalist had said that "no man living or who ever lived—not Shakespeare nor Michael Angelo—could confer honour more than he took on entering the House of Lords" (Dec. 15, 1883). This was *àpropos* of Tennyson's acceptance of a peerage, which was highly disapproved of at The Pines. Between the announcement and Tennyson's taking his seat, Swinburne poured forth an amazing series of poems in vituperation of the House of Lords, the most innocuous of which occupy too much space in *A Midsummer Holiday*. "Clear the way, my Lords and lackeys!" he shrieks, and the appellations "serf" and "cur" and "sycophant" hurtle in vociferous sonnets, but all this indignation has no political significance; it was Tennyson whom he was really pursuing. Mingled with those oddities, however, there are to be found in the volume of 1884 some protestations of a sincere and beautiful patriotism. Swinburne spent the autumn of this year at the Mill House, Sidestrand, on the Norfolk coast.

In 1885 Swinburne published a blank verse play of Italian freedom, *Marino Faliero*, dedicated to Aurelio Saffi; in 1886 a prose *Study of Victor Hugo*, occasioned by Hugo's death in the preceding year; a collection of *Miscellanies* reprinted; and a play, *Locrine*, which is more

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worthy of attention than any of the works just mentioned. *Locrine* is written in curious arrangements of rhyme; "there is something irregularly like them in Greene's *Selimus*, as well as in Lord Brooke's toughest of dramatic indigestibles,"[1] as the author said in a letter long afterwards. *Locrine* was acted by a dramatic society early in 1899, and was found to be interesting and arresting by a literary audience. No other play of Swinburne's was put on the boards during his lifetime.

It is useless to deny that Swinburne's friendships, which had formed so important a part of his life, were considerably curtailed as soon as he retired to Putney. Watts-Dunton has recorded that "from this moment [in 1879] his connection with bohemian London ceased entirely." It is not necessary to comment on this retrenchment, further than to point out that it put a stop to all companionship on the old footing. Some former friends accepted the embargo and ceased to communicate with the poet, considering themselves judged to be "bohemian." Others, like Sir Richard Burton, braved this censure, and insisted on coming now and then to The Pines. During the first five or six years Swinburne was occasionally allowed to visit friends in London in the middle of the day, but his deafness was a growing difficulty. William Morris, who was a favourite with Watts, was always welcome at Putney, and Jowett even more so; these were held to be wholly untainted by the dangerous "bohemian" tendency. Morris latterly saw less and less of Swinburne,

[1] This is a reference to the *Alaham* and the *Mustapha* of Fulke Greville (1633).

though he sent him nearly all the Kelmscott Press books. On one occasion he and Burne-Jones were together when they ran up against Swinburne, who seemed unable to recognise them. Ill-health kept Gabriel and Christina Rossetti aloof; the rest came more and more rarely. Death was busy in their ranks: D. G. R. passed away in 1882, Lord Houghton in 1885, Sir Henry Taylor in 1886, Inchbold in 1888, Burton in 1890, Jowett and Madox Brown in 1893, Christina Rossetti and John Nichol in 1894, W. Morris in 1896, and lastly Eliza Lynn Linton and Edward Burne-Jones in 1898. Swinburne was then left with scarcely a surviving friend from the old Pre-Raphaelite generation, except the long-estranged George Meredith, with whom he held no renewed communication till I had the gratification of bringing the old friends together again by letter on the occasion of Meredith's seventieth birthday.

This emotional emptiness was filled by the vigilant and assiduous companionship of Theodore Watts (who, in 1896, became Watts-Dunton), and by the affectionate respect which came to the poet from younger men and women who had not known him in the Pre-Putneyan days. Among these special mention must be made of Mr. Thomas J. Wise, Swinburne's future bibliographer and editor, who was first taken to The Pines in 1886 by the Jewish poetess Mathilde Blind (1841–96), whom Swinburne had known since her girlhood. Swinburne received such visitors with unwearied courtesy, and he took a pleasure in their attentions, especially when they were ladies who brought very young children with them. These visitors

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were always delighted with the welcome he gave them, and many of them have recorded their pleasant impressions of him. It is, however, essential to say that the very gentle, punctilious old gentleman who received them, after some delay, in the unvarying presence of Watts-Dunton, was very far indeed from being the brilliant being, the scarlet and azure macaw among the birds of the forest, who had been the wonder, the delight, and sometimes the terror of an earlier generation. He was the shadow of that splendid high-flyer. Nor were the poet's own thoughts long absent from the wonderful days of his youth, nor from those old dead companions who had peopled it with dreams; and he celebrated most of these latter in verse.

There were exceptions, however, to Swinburne's amiable attitude towards former friends long absent, and the most painful of these was the sudden violent attack on Whistler in the *Fortnightly Review* for June 1888. Nothing had been seen to lead up to this onslaught, which amused an idle public, but startled and grieved the victim. Whistler had been an intimate and a useful friend to Swinburne in the early 'sixties, and the poet had responded warmly. In the summer of 1865 Swinburne had made strenuous endeavours to bring Ruskin to Whistler's studio, and to modify the critic's prejudice against the painter. Although Swinburne and Whistler had ceased to meet familiarly after 1879, there had been no rupture. As late as 1880, Swinburne wrote to Mrs. Lynn Linton that the paintings of Whistler "are second only to the very greatest works of

art in any age." But Theodore Watts had never liked Whistler, whose wit had treated the dignified critic with too capricious a levity. He chose to consider the American painter "a bit of a charlatan," and he had instilled his prejudice into Swinburne.[1] His own words were, "I persuaded Swinburne to write the really brilliant article." It was not "brilliant": it was marred by Swinburne's worst affectations of hyperbole and irony, and can only be regretted. Whistler made a brief reply in *The World* newspaper, in his characteristic manner, but rather sadly than fiercely. He never forgot the splendid lyric defence of his picture, "The Little White Girl," which Swinburne had opportunely written in 1865; and so late as 1902 Whistler had the generosity to recall that poem as "a rare and graceful tribute from the poet to the painter—a noble recognition of work by the production of a nobler one."

After 1884 Swinburne gave his lyrical talent a certain respite, and when he returned to the composition of verse, as he did in 1888, the beneficial results of this were manifest. He now wrote "The Armada" and "Pan and Thalassius," the former an example of his redundant magnificence, the latter of his subtlety. These are the most solid contributions to *Poems and Ballads: Third Series* (1889), which is also notable as containing nine Border ballads of great value, written a quarter of a century earlier, during

[1] Mr. Wise has kindly communicated to me the rather full version of the incident which Watts-Dunton dictated to him in the last year of his life.

the Pre-Raphaelite period. These he had set up in type in 1877, and had then suppressed them. This volume was dedicated, in charming Omar Khayyám quatrains, to William Bell Scott, in memory of old Northumbrian days—

> . . . when I rode by moors and streams,
> Reining my rhymes into buoyant order
> Through honied leagues of the northland border.

Scott had now reached his eightieth year and was dying. There was no trace then, nor until his memoirs were indiscreetly published two or three years later, of the undercurrent of envious feeling which Swinburne immediately resented with more violence than dignity.

The late Miss Edith Sichel, shortly before her lamented death, was kind enough to write out for me her solitary experience of the poet. It may be objected that, if once to "see Shelley plain" is a small thing, once to see Swinburne dimly is a still smaller one, but Miss Sichel's nocturne is so drolly told that I make no apology for inserting it:

> In the late autumn of 1890, I happened one evening at dusk to be walking along the edge of Wimbledon Common, in a thick white mist. Feeling that my shoe-lace was trailing on the ground, I bent down to tie it. While I was doing so, some one stumbled over me and cried out "*Oh!*" in a tone—almost a squeak—of passionate dismay. I looked up to find a white face immediately above me, and a blaze of red hair which seemed to part the mist like a flame. In a flash a small, thin-legged man's figure tripped precipitately away, and the fog appeared to swallow him up as if he had been

a vision. I felt as if I had seen some Azrael or Uriel of Blake's creation. I think he wore a soft black wide-awake, but of this I am not sure. After he had vanished, I walked on with the sense that something delightful had happened to me. This was all the intercourse that I ever had with Algernon Charles Swinburne.

The monotony of Swinburne's life was broken into in a manner very agreeable to him by his being invited to take a leading part in the Eton Ninth Jubilee of 1891. He was asked to write the Ode for the occasion, a task which he accepted eagerly and executed promptly. In sending it in to the Vice-Provost, he amusingly wrote: "Here is my copy of verses—shown up in time, as I understand—and I only hope I shall not be put in the bill for showing up too few." At the same time, he suggested that the boys should act, for the first time since the sixteenth century, "the very first comedy in the language," *Ralph Roister Doister*, by Nicholas Udall, Henry VIII.'s Head Master of Eton. He was anxious to be present at the proceedings on the 23rd of June, when Dr. Warre, his former "form-fellow," asked him to stay over the night at his house, but Watts-Dunton declined to sanction it, and the poet submitted with a little sigh. Mr. Ainger, after a dinner in the Drill Hall opposite Mr. Everard's garden, when Mr. A. J. Balfour was the principal guest, expressed the general feeling of regret at Eton that Mr. Swinburne had been "compelled" to refuse the invitation.

Swinburne's publications now became less frequent. But in 1892 appeared a short play, *The Sisters*, which has already been dealt with as

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full of reminiscences of the poet's childhood, but otherwise of scant importance. The lyrical harvest of six years was garnered in *Astrophel*, dedicated in lines of great tenderness to William Morris. *Studies in Prose and Poetry*, like *A Study of Ben Jonson* which preceded it, testified in redundant prose to the industry, activity, and pertinacity of the critic. Full of years and honours, Victor Hugo was dead at last, but the idolater still waved censers of eulogy in front of the shrine. Here, too, is reprinted the essay, written in 1887, in which Swinburne, who had been one of the earliest to welcome Walt Whitman as a "strong-winged soul with prophetic lips hot with the blood-beats of song," enounced a full recantation.

Even as lately as February 1885 he had written, "I retain a very cordial admiration for not a little of Whitman's earlier work," and when I visited the Sage at Camden later in that year, Swinburne had sent him by me his "cordial regards." But now the Muse of Walt Whitman was nothing but "a drunken apple-woman, indecently sprawling in the slush and garbage of the gutter amid the rotten refuse of her overturned fruit-stall." This was an interesting example of the slow tyranny exercised on Swinburne's judgment by the will of Watts, who had never been able to see merit in the work of Walt Whitman, and who frankly admitted that he "hated him most heartily."

When Tennyson died, and during the long interregnum before the appointment of Alfred Austin, expert opinion was practically unanimous

in desiring to see the laureateship offered to Swinburne. It is reported that Queen Victoria, discussing the matter with Gladstone, said, "I am told that Mr. Swinburne is the best poet in my dominions." But Gladstone held the view that the turbulency of Swinburne's political opinions, particularly as expressed with regard to certain friendly foreign powers, made it impossible even to consider his claims to the laurel. Swinburne preserved a complete silence on the subject, so far as the newspaper reporters were concerned. In private he expressed the conviction that Canon Dixon, the author of *Mano*, possessed the highest claim to be poet-laureate, or, failing him, Lord De Tabley. It will be observed that each of these poets was older than Swinburne, who had little knowledge of the verse of men born after 1850, and even less curiosity about their careers.

In the summer of 1895, when his mind was greatly occupied with memories of his childhood, and of the dear Northumbrian faces that had passed away so long ago, Swinburne started *The Tale of Balen*, an Arthurian story of the Border country. This is, with the exception of *Tristram*, the longest narrative poem which he composed, and it is in many respects a very remarkable performance. It is unquestionably the best work of the last twenty years of his life. Yet for the biographer the principal interest of *Balen* lies in the evidence it gives that Swinburne was now living more and more among the phantoms of the past. Like his hero before his death,

He drank the draught of life's first wine
Again ; he saw the moorland shine,
The rioting rapids of the Tyne,
The woods, the cliffs, the sea ;
The joy that lives at heart and home,
The joy to rest, the joy to roam,
The joy of crags and scaurs he clomb,
The rapture of the encountering foam
Embraced and breasted of the boy,
The first good steed his knees bestrode,
The first wild sound of songs that flowed
Through ears that thrilled and heart that glowed,
Fulfilled his death with joy.

In these lines the legendary Sir Balen was forgotten, and the curtain of half a century fell back to reveal the little Algernon who once rode and climbed, swam and shouted, in the bright, sharp air of Northumberland.

A copy of *The Tale of Balen* was sent by Swinburne to William Morris, who was too ill to do more than glance at it. Morris died on the 3rd of October 1896. Though his name is not mentioned, Swinburne referred to Morris in the epilogue to *A Channel Passage,* in the lines :

No braver, no trustier, no purer,
No stronger and clearer a soul
Bore witness more splendid and surer
For manhood found perfect and whole
Since man was a warrior and dreamer
Than his who in hatred of wrong
Would fain have arisen a redeemer
By sword or by song.

With Morris's socialistic aspirations Swinburne at no time found himself in sympathy, and the reference is therefore the more generous.

The Tale of Balen was dedicated to the only

survivor who could share the earliest of these reminiscences, to the poet's venerable mother, now settled at Barking Hall, where, on the 19th of July 1896, Lady Jane Swinburne was welcomed on the morning of her eighty-seventh birthday by an ode in which her son enshrined his tenderness, his reverence, and his adoring affection. But on the 26th of November of that same year "the woods that watched her waking" beheld that gracious form no more. The grief of her son was overwhelming, and it may be said that this formed the last crisis of his own life. From this moment he became even more gentle, more remote, more unupbraiding than ever. He went on gliding over the commons of Wimbledon with the old noiseless regularity, but it could hardly be said that he held a place any longer in the ordinary world around him.

The thirteen last years of Swinburne's life were spent almost as if within a Leyden jar. Nothing could be more motionless than the existence of "the little old genius, and his little old acolyte, in their dull little villa." Swinburne still brightened up, with punctilious courtesy, at the approach of any visitor who contrived to break through the double guard of the housemaid and of Watts-Dunton. He would still stand by his shelf of precious quartos and astonish a guest, as he did the Dutch novelist, Maarten Maartens, by presenting volume after volume for inspection, with "the strangely dancing quiver and flash of his little body, like a living flame." Still on moderate pressure he would read aloud with a mannered outpour of tumultuous

utterance, and then sink back, exhausted and radiant. Still he would talk, in the familiar tones, of the life-long objects of his admiration, of Landor and Hugo and Marlowe, of Northumberland and Niton and Sark, "bobbing all the while like a cork on the sea of his enthusiasms." Still he would dream, with eyelids wide open, long gazing at the light in silence, until, as Mr. Coulson Kernahan has admirably said, "one could see by his flashing eyes that the hounds of utterance were chafing and fretting to fling themselves on the quarry," and then the torrent of reminiscent speech would follow.

Under the ceaseless vigilance of his faithful shield and companion the placid months went by until, in November 1903, after one of his long walks in the rain, Swinburne caught a chill which presently developed into a dangerous attack of pneumonia. With great difficulty his life was saved by the assiduity and skill of Sir Thomas Barlow. From this time forth his lungs remained delicate, but he lived nearly six years longer. Several publications amused his leisure during the placid close of his career—a collection of lyrical poems, *A Channel Passage* (1904); a novel, *Love's Cross-Currents* (1905, but written twenty-nine years earlier); and the opening of a drama, *The Duke of Gandia* (1908, but started in 1882). He persisted in writing verses, as he frankly confessed, "to escape from boredom." He continued to enjoy good health, although now as prematurely old as in early days he had been conspicuously young for his years. Nothing foreshadowed a change when only a fortnight

before his death he received at The Pines Mr. James Fitzmaurice-Kelly, who has been kind enough to give me his impressions of the visit. "Mr. Swinburne," he writes, "returned from his usual walk, looking tired, but not evidently unwell. After luncheon he invited me to go up to his study and look at his books. They were fewer than one might expect to find in the study of a famous man-of-letters. Swinburne displayed his collection of Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists with ingenuous pride, and when I ventured to compliment him on his rarities, he smiled and said, 'Yes! not bad for a poor man, are they?' Glancing at the other books on the shelves, I caught sight of various volumes of Victor Hugo, very much the worse for wear. In reply to some remark about them, Swinburne replied, 'They ought to go to the binder, but I can't bear to part with them.'"

It was, therefore, in the unabated fervour of a life-time that death found this faithful lover of Marlowe and Hugo. His illness was brief and scarcely painful. The sharpness of Easter in 1909 produced an epidemic of influenza at The Pines, which affected every member of Watts-Dunton's household, and in Swinburne's case brought on what soon became double pneumonia. His physician, Dr. Edwin White, sent for Sir Douglas Powell, but the course of the disease could not be arrested, and the poet died, very peacefully, on the 10th of April 1909, having entered his seventy-third year by five days.

Algernon Swinburne was buried in the romantic churchyard of Bonchurch, in the midst of the

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graves of his family. He lies in that beautiful orchard-terrace, within an apple-cast of the garden in which his childhood was so happily spent. On loud nights the trumpet of the sea is audible from the spot where he sleeps, and so, in the words dedicated to his memory by the greatest of his successors,

> . . . here, beneath the waking constellations,
> Where the waves peal their everlasting strains,
> And their dull subterrene reverberations
> Shake him when storms make mountains of their plains—
> Him once their peer in sad improvisations,
> And deft as wind to cleave their frothy manes,—
> I leave him, while the daylight gleam declines
> Upon the capes and chines.[1]

[1] Thomas Hardy: "A Singer Asleep."

CHAPTER IX

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

THE connection which undoubtedly exists, in certain cases only, between imaginative gifts of a high order and peculiarities of physical conformation, has never been explained. It is not by mere accident that Chopin and Raphael and Shelley have a constitution and an appearance so unlike those of ordinary mortals, nor is it the rule that men of genius are, like Walter Scott and Robert Browning, healthy examples of the ordinary type. There is no rule or custom in the matter, and great talents blow where they list. Nevertheless there is a tendency to strangeness, an excess or violence of delicacy, which is proverbially associated with poetry, and with the bardic appearance of exclusively aesthetic persons. This, although not the rule, is more than the exception, and, where it occurs, is not to be neglected as an element in the general analysis of character. In the case of Swinburne the physical strangeness exceeded, perhaps, that of any other entirely sane man of imaginative genius whose characteristics have been preserved for us. It must be defined with as much exactitude as is possible without falling into the error of caricature.

Algernon Swinburne was in height five feet

and four and a half inches. He carried his large head very buoyantly on a tiny frame, the apparent fragility of which was exaggerated by the sloping of his shoulders, which gave him, almost into middle life, a girlish look. He held himself upright, and, as he was very restless, he skipped as he stood, with his hands jerking or linked behind him while he talked, and, when he was still, one toe was often pressed against the heel of the other foot. In this attitude his slenderness and slightness gave him a kind of fairy look, which I, for one, have never seen repeated in any other human being. It recurs to my memory as his greatest outward peculiarity.

His head was bigger than that of most men of his height; as Sir George Young tells us, when he entered Eton at twelve years old his hat was already the largest in the school. Mr. Lindo Myers, who came over with him from Havre in the autumn of 1868, writes to me, that, Swinburne's hat having been blown overboard, "when we got to Southampton, we went to three hatters before we found one hat that would go on, and then we had to rip the lining out. His head was immense." In the late Putney days, when he became bald, this bigness of his head was less noticeable than when it had been emphasised by the vast "burning bush" of his red hair, which in early days he wore very much fluffed out at the sides. Lord Redesdale always used to speak of Algernon's "zazzera." This is an old Italian word for a great head of blond hair combed out to its full circumference. A poet of the sixteenth century, quoted by the

Algernon Charles Swinburne
from a photograph taken by Messrs Elliott & Fry about 1869

Emery Walker ph. sc

Dizionario della Crusca, says, "Biondo fue nella chioma, sicchè tutta la sua zazzera sembrava splendore d' oro." This might have been written of Swinburne in his youth. The orb of this mop reduced the apparent thickness of his neck, which, looked at merely in relation to his falling shoulders, was excessive, yet seemed no more than was necessary to carry the balloon of head and hair. In a guarded and ironic sketch of life "At The Pines"[1]—a sketch which deserves close attention—Mr. E. V. Lucas remarks that Swinburne's eyes in the later years "were fixed and mirthless." He had always had this steady look. "Above the eyes, however," Mr. Lucas proceeds, "all was different and magnificent—a dome lofty and aloof as one could ask, curiously like Shakespeare's." One of the contradictions which we meet with in every attempt to analyse Swinburne's character is to be found in the fact that although he seemed so fragile and so light, the muscular endurance of his frame was remarkable. His untiring little legs might have been made of steel wire.

As Watts-Dunton, towards his eightieth year, and when his memory was certainly not any longer very fresh, chose to select D. G. Rossetti's painting of Swinburne, dated 1861, and now in the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge, as that which he particularly recommended, it seems needful to explain why this opinion must not be endorsed. If posterity accepts the view that Rossetti's portrait "brings back" the appearance of Swinburne "more than any other," the conception

[1] *The New Statesman*, March 25, 1916.

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of what he really looked like will be entirely lost. That drawing is a careful Pre-Raphaelite study, but it is essentially unlike its subject. The proportions of the face are wrong; the forehead is reduced in height and breadth; the nose is too fleshy; the weakness of the mouth is avoided; the chin is square and prominent, instead of pointed and retreating; and the throat is almost a goitre. But the great fault of this picture, as a portrait, is that, though individual features may be correct, the whole gives a false conception of general character. Rossetti has painted his young friend as a Knight of the Table Round, languishing for the Sangraal and for remote adventures. The real Swinburne was not heavy, burly, and almost lethargic, like this Arthurian conception of him, but light with the lightness of thistle-down, when aroused as alert as a terrier, and habitually thrilled with a quite modern type of intellectual energy.

It is in the expression of the eyes that Rossetti has peculiarly gone astray; he has made the eyes large, and *à fleur de tête*, and gazing languorously sideways; whereas Swinburne's greenish-grey eyes (which Rossetti has painted light-blue) were small, and deeply set, and were fixed straight before him with surprising intensity. Mr. Adams' impression of what the poet looked like in 1862, at almost the very time when Rossetti was painting him, gives the true portrait: "A tropical bird, high-crested, long-beaked, quick-moving, with rapid utterance and screams of humour." Pellegrini's famous coloured drawing, made in the winter of 1874, displays him very

accurately, with of course the caricaturist's exaggeration, as he looked twelve years after Mr. Adams saw him at Fryston, but here again the eyes are wrong. No artist seems to have contrived to record the flashing concentration of Swinburne's level look.

The mental and moral characteristics which distinguished the actions of this singular being were no less remarkable than the physical. In dealing with Algernon Swinburne's character we are struck with the fact that it was, to a very unusual extent, what the biologists call epigenetic, that is to say, its qualities owed very little to heredity. When we examined his parentage we saw that no one at all resembling him intellectually had hitherto been observed either in the Swinburne or in the Ashburnham family, while such idiosyncrasies as could have been inherited were purely physical, and neither mental nor moral. He was started in life so original that he resisted all the pressure of education, and it would be difficult to find another man, brought up at Eton and Oxford, who has continued so unlike all other human beings as Swinburne was. Yet he was neither abnormal nor a monster. In favourable conditions he was lovable, gentle, capable of the most generous enthusiasm, active, essentially healthy and sound ; what distinguished him from others was not a degeneracy or disease, but a difference. He was successfully modelled in a mould unlike most, and perhaps all, of his fellow-creatures. His deeper faculties worked in a very curious way, and sometimes baffled analysis altogether.

This analysis is rendered the more difficult because of the discrepancies which showed themselves in his behaviour. Intrinsically, Swinburne's character was as firm as a twist of iron, which bends under pressure, but is otherwise unaffected by outer forces. From the earliest record of his childhood to that of his last hours at Putney, we see him unchanged by conditions and unaffected by opinion. This gives his career a certain rigidity, which appears to be belied by the fact that he was dependent, even to excess, upon the support of others, and that his conversation and correspondence took the colour of his associates. When he was successively "under the influence," as it is called, of Jowett or Burton, of Rossetti or Watts-Dunton, Swinburne bowed his will in the direction of each of them in turn, dipping towards them like a magnetic needle towards its pole. In the same way, there were people who repelled him, in spite of his admiration of their gifts and his desire to be affected by them; especially this was true of Ruskin and Browning. When he was in a state of magnetic induction, Swinburne would appear to a superficial observer so docile, so absorbed in renunciation, as to have no personal force left. He reposed, in passive adoration, upon the bosom of the adored one,—the great instance of this, in the intellectual sphere, being his attitude to Victor Hugo. It is probable that if Hugo had suddenly become insane, without that fact being explained to Swinburne, the latter would have continued to accept, without the slightest suspicion, the ravings of his idol. Yet who was

more shrewd than he in observing a lapse in Browning or a fault in Byron ?

Although so far removed from the type with which his contemporaries were familiar, Swinburne was not conscious of any difference, and strove to avoid everything like affectation or eccentricity. He was invariably dressed with care, in the exact mode of the hour,—at least until he went to Putney, when his retirement from all society excused a less punctilious clothing. At the moment of his great notoriety, a firm of London tailors published a portrait of Swinburne as " an illustration of our full dress suit " ! His hair was always unusually long, but he accounted for that by saying that it was a concession to the painters, who preferred it so. His manners were elaborate, and, when he chose, exquisite ; in this respect he was very human : he could be radiantly courteous if he pleased, and he could be of a stony stiffness.

He was a little too ready, in middle life, to take offence, and he showed it by an excess of dignity and hauteur : he would respond to an explosion of familiarity by a prodigious bowing and stiffening of his arrogant little body. Often, or at least sometimes, he gave an impression of defiance, which was really an instinct of self-defence, for he disliked promiscuous contact and a " hail-fellow-well-met " behaviour. But to a man or woman with whom he found himself in pleasant relations, he was suave and gracious in the extreme, only apt to bewilder a newly-made acquaintance by taking for granted in him an exact agreement of interests with himself. Thus have I seen an architect gratified by receiving

Swinburne's pointed attentions, yet driven to despair in the effort to discover what could be the *Arden of Feversham* which was the subject of his conversation.

In a valuable letter to myself the late Dutch novelist, J. M. W. van der Poorten-Schwartz, who paid his respects to Swinburne in his later days, has recorded of him: "In the unique diversity of the British race he struck me at once as an Englishman of birth. I knew nothing about his social position, but he was manifestly a foreigner and an English aristocrat." The acuteness of this remark is double, because in calling the poet "manifestly a foreigner," the visitor expressed his sense of that unlikeness to all his contemporaries which has already been mentioned, and in insisting upon his "birth" he showed recognition of the poet's remarkable distinction of manner. He was essentially an aristocrat, in spite of the boisterousness of his republicanism, and in this combination or contrast the examples of Mirabeau and of Landor help us to understand Swinburne, of whom it might be justly remarked, as it was of the author of *Gebir*, that he was one "not only rebellious himself, but a promoter of rebellion in others." This attitude of political non-conformity showed itself, as we have seen, in his early Oxford days, and it persisted to the end of his life. It was largely an exotic sentiment, fostered by literature, by his early love of Italy and Italian things, and by the romance which surrounded Mazzini as with a halo. If a reader has the curiosity to isolate all that Swinburne has said about republicanism apart

from Italy, and France in relation to Italy, he will be surprised to find how small the residue is.

In particular, there is not, so far as I recollect, in all the voluminous writings of Swinburne a single line in which the English Constitution or the Monarchy is attacked. In a few pieces, such as *An Appeal* (Nov. 20, 1867), we find England called upon to "put forth thy strength, and release" persecuted republicans in other countries. In "The Twilight of the Lords" he seems to call for a constitutional change; but it is only in the visionary verses called "Perinde ac Cadaver" that anything can be pointed to that resembles a reproach to this country for not joining the confederacy of the liberated nations, and even then the answer comes in the question, "We have filed the teeth of the snake, Monarchy, how should it bite?" In the "Litany of Nations," when it is England's turn to speak, she invokes Milton and Shelley with rhetorical remoteness, and characteristically describes "the beacon-bright Republic" as "far-off sighted." This attitude to the Government of his own country must not be overlooked, because Swinburne was perfectly fearless, and, if it had pleased him to do so, would have attacked English institutions as freely as he denounced "Strong Germany girdled with guile." But, as a matter of fact, he adored his own country to the verge of Jingoism, and resented with what seemed to strangers inconsistent violence the slightest criticism of Queen Victoria. Lady Ritchie remembers his saying with great simplicity, in answer to the question, "What

would you give for England?" "I would give my life." At the time of the Land League agitation, a Fenian emissary visited The Pines, with a request that Swinburne would write an Ode on the Proclamation of an Irish Republic. Watts-Dunton used to give a humorous description of the swift retreat of the burly visitor in the wind of the rage of the indignant poet, who bid him begone before he so far overcame his repulsion as to kick the intruder downstairs. What he did write was "The Ballad of Truthful Charles,"[1] which no one has yet had the fortitude to place in his collected poems.

It is not to be questioned that, under the pressure of Theodore Watts, Swinburne's political opinions took a singular volte-face after 1879. The author of *Songs before Sunrise* and *Songs of Two Nations* ought to have been a pro-Boer, but he was violently the reverse. He developed a strong dislike to Mr. Gladstone, and he hated his scheme of Home Rule, which the early rhapsodist would have welcomed. At the time of the Midlothian campaign, 1879–80, Swinburne wrote the following lines in a lady's album:

Choose, England: here the paths before thee part.
Wouldst thou have honour? Be as now thou art;
Wouldst thou have shame? Take Gladstone to thy heart.

The only form in which his youthful republicanism survived was in an intense hatred of the professed tyrants and destroyers of liberty, in the van of

[1] Privately printed by Mr. T. J. Wise, with other uncollected pieces, in April 1910.

whom he placed the rulers of Germany. He expatiated to the last in praise of

> England, elect of time,
> By freedom sealed sublime.

After reading J. S. Mill's *Autobiography*, he had told John Morley (March 28, 1874), "I never had the honour to meet [Mill], but ever since his *Liberty* came out, it has been the text-book of my creed as to public morals and political faith."

In 1899 no one dared to approach him with an invitation to celebrate either of the South African republics. At the moment when war broke out he wrote the fine sonnet which closes with the words, "Strike, England, and strike home." This was followed by others, all inspired by the noblest and purest indignation, and by a burning pride in our country. At the darkest moment, the old poet rejoiced at the vision of "England's name a light on land and sea," and boasted that—

> Alone, as Milton and as Wordsworth found
> And hailed their England, when from all around
> Howled all the recreant hate of envious knaves,
> Sublime she stands.

When the proper time for publication comes it will be found, with interest and perhaps surprise, how accurately Swinburne predicted the treachery of Germany almost with his latest lyric breath.

He went far in his attitude of complacency with what might even be called British prejudice, but he did not admit, and we need not perceive, any inconsistency between this "Jingo" patriotism

and the ardours of his youthful republicanism. He would have said that what he desired was liberty for nations that are still captive, and not the disturbance of those that are already free. But his generous and emotional political opinions must not be too rudely examined.

In a life where action took scarcely any part at all, the spoken word came to be only second in importance to the written word. A Scotchman who met Swinburne when he was staying with Nichol at Glasgow early in 1878 said, "He is one of the finest talkers of sense, and certainly the best talker of nonsense I have ever met with." A still earlier witness speaks of "the wild Walpurgis night of Swinburne's talk." His conversation was vehement and copious; it was usually concerned with literature, with which Swinburne showed a familiarity and an enthusiasm which were extraordinary. His criticism in conversation was exceedingly stimulating, partly because it was independent and resolute, and partly because it was illuminated, far more than his written criticism, by whimsical flashes of humour and startling colloquial images. Perhaps I may be permitted to give an example not hitherto printed. It is an extract from a journal, and records a visit paid to my house on the 16th of August 1876:

> Swinburne complained of having been unwell, and he described his symptoms with an infantile ingenuousness and perfect plausibility. He was weak and pale at first, but soon brightened into a good flow of talk, first about dramatic literature. He has never been able to read Bailey's *Festus* through. The difference between

Festus and the *Balder* of Sydney Dobell is the same as that between Mr. Mantalini's dowager who had a demd outline and the countess who had no outline at all. Bailey had no ear and no metrical power at all, but he had a demd outline. Dobell, on the contrary, had no outline at all, but he never wrote a bad verse. Swinburne recited with enthusiasm the passage about

> . . . hellebore, like a girl murderess,
> Green-eyed and sick with jealousy, and white
> With wintry thoughts of poison,

and so on, down to the "inglorious moschatel," in *Balder*. We passed to Beddoes, of whom he said that no one else had ever written plays so utterly wanting in conversational truth. The dialogue in *Death's Jest-Book* was the howls of madmen trying to out-stun one another. Of course Browning delights in Beddoes as the only writer of dialogue worse than himself. I suggested Byron was worse, but Swinburne waved that aside, and said that Byron's plays were indeed flatter and less poetical than Browning's, but the conversation in them was more reasonable. We then talked of Wordsworth's single play, *The Borderers*; Swinburne expressing great admiration of it as a juvenile production, and noting with surprise the morbid hectic tone of its ethics. He would like to know what was passing in Wordsworth's life when he wrote it: it is far superior, as a psychological product, to Coleridge's *Remorse*. He praised the *King Otho* of Keats, but of the Ariosto vein of that poet he spoke with the greatest contempt. He thought the vulgarity of *The Cap and Bells* quite extraordinary; he had drawn the attention of D. G. R. to it, who had said that if it stood alone it would justify all Maga's insolence to Keats. It alarmed Swinburne to think that Keats should have gone "back to his gallipots" after composing *Hyperion* and *The Eve of St. Agnes*, and that *The Cap and Bells* should be the latest of Keats' productions. He pursed up his mouth and made an owlish gesture with his eyes, as he added, "It gives one a horrid thought!"

With this, the record of one who was constantly seeing Swinburne at that time, may be compared the impressions of a very acute observer, Professor Andrew C. Bradley, who saw him only twice :

I had a momentary vision of him in my first year at Balliol between October 1869 and June 1870, when he came down into the Garden Quadrangle with Jowett. But some seven years later I was in the same room with him for an hour or more. Jowett was then Master, and I a young don whom he knew to be interested in poetry ; and he asked me to look in after dinner to meet Swinburne, who had come with Watts to stay with him. As soon as I entered the drawing-room he introduced me. I had a surprise. The poet's hand, as I took it, turned out to be plump and flabby—not to say podgy—whereas I expected it to be nervous and thin. His cloud of hair was of the old red colour, but there was a suspicion, I think, of baldness, and his eyes seemed to me a little faded ; but perhaps what had faded was really some of my hero-worship. Their colour I should call blue-grey with a tinge of green. He was very kind, and talked to me for some time without a trace of patronage or self-consciousness. When he became animated—and he was so for most of the time—he flapped his hands continuously, even reminding me, though not painfully, of a man I once saw who suffered from a mild form of St. Vitus's dance. What I can now remember of his talk is little enough. I spoke to him with enthusiasm of " Mater Triumphalis " ; and that pleased him, but he said—what to me sounded almost blasphemous—that it threatened to go on for ever and he cut it short. Perhaps it was the metre of this poem that made me ask him if he knew Myers' *Saint Paul*, and what he thought of the metrical effect : but he had not read it. I questioned him about Beddoes, whom I had just read for the first time, and he spoke of him rather coolly, and said that

his lyrics did not sing. He talked delightfully about Rossetti's poems, quoting the first stanza of the *Bride's Prelude* (which was not published until a dozen years later), and he quoted it very musically. After a while he began to declaim against some of the *Idylls of the King* and to make fun of the *Dedication*, and went on to describe some kind of burlesque he had written, in which Queen Victoria figured as Guinevere and Lord John Russell, I think, as Lancelot. He was beginning to quote from it, and became excited and shrill; and, as the matter promised to be indecorous and the room was full of ladies, I was half-amused and half-alarmed: but Jowett came up and interrupted us—not, I think, because he heard what Swinburne was saying, but because I had had my full share of the great man.

In 1881 Jowett sent Swinburne up to the Bodleian Library with a note addressed to Mr. F. Madan, now Bodley's Librarian, asking him to turn the poet loose in the Malone Room, where the treasures of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama are kept in a delightful, unconventional kind of cottage "parlour," with a homely look and in a quiet out-of-the-way position. Mr. Madan writes to me:

> It was impossible to allow any one to be alone in the room, so I went down with Swinburne, who was soon pulling down volume after volume of that seductive literature, absolutely absorbed in it. When I occasionally made some remark, suggesting a new shelf for his attention, he used to give a violent start as if hit, fully illustrating the common expression "struck with a sudden thought." This was not resentment of interruption, but extreme nervous sensitiveness.

Professor W. P. Ker tells me that he dined in Swinburne's company, as the guest of John Nichol,

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on the 31st of March 1891. Orchardson and Mrs. Lynn Linton were also present, with others :

Swinburne talked mostly to Mrs. Lynn Linton about Landor, and took no part in the general conversation, until a young Scotchman lately come from Paris declared that he understood the writings of Stéphane Mallarmé. Swinburne, who was sitting next to him, turned upon him crying and flashing out, " Then I suppose you will say that you understand Cyril Tourneur's *Transform'd Metamorphosis* ? " I was glad to see him so suddenly liven us, but I wish he had said something less like the controversial style of Freeman.

But it appeared that the young man had spoken of Victor Hugo in a manner of which Swinburne disapproved.

To these early impressions may be added that of Mr. Sydney C. Cockerell, who went with Mr. Emery Walker to dine at The Pines so late as the 29th of September 1904. Mr. Cockerell has been kind enough to give me a copy of what he noted the next day :

Went with Emery Walker to dine with Swinburne and Watts-Dunton at The Pines. Watts-Dunton talked well at dinner, but Swinburne (who looked very well and young—his beard still with a tinge of red in it) said nothing until we were half way through, when he suddenly burst out with a eulogy of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and expressed his wonder that it had never been acted. He also spoke of his reading *Arden of Feversham* at Oxford and coming to the conclusion that, if not by Shakespeare, it was by some one capable of even greater things than Shakespeare was capable of at the time when it was written. After dinner we went up into his room and he delighted us by reading out two fine scenes from his new unfinished play on the Borgias. He read in a loud and dramatic manner, with much

nervous movement, enforcing every sentence. I took my Bembo and Catullus MSS. and the Ovid containing Ben Jonson's signature, with all of which he was greatly pleased. He said that Catullus was the first Latin author to please him at Eton, Virgil and Horace having obviously written with the sole object of tormenting school-boys; and that Bembo's Latin verse and Italian prose were respectively the best done in his day.

He was not disinclined, on occasion, to refer to himself with an engaging frankness, as if he were speaking of some one else. At Jowett's dinner-table R. W. Raper once asked him which of the English poets had the best ear. Swinburne replied with earnestness and gravity: "Shakespeare, without doubt; then Milton; then Shelley; then, I do not know what other people would do, but I should put myself."

These are fragments of the habitual "table-talk" of Swinburne, which flowed in this way from theme to theme with an inexhaustible humour and resource, but was almost wholly of an aesthetic, if not purely literary, character. It had, even by the year 1876, lost some of its disconcerting brilliance and daring. Of these, the best report yet forthcoming is that bequeathed to us by Guy de Maupassant, who met him at Étretat in 1868. What struck that remarkable observer was the "almost supernatural" aspect of the amazing English poet:

Il fut très cordial, très accueillant; et le charme extraordinaire de son intelligence me séduisait aussitôt. Pendant tout le déjeuner on parla d'art, de littérature et d'humanité; et les opinions de [Swinburne] jetaient sur les choses une espèce de lueur troublante, macabre, car il avait une manière de voir et de comprendre qui me

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le montrait comme un visionnaire malade, ivre de poésie perverse et magique. . . . Mais il était délicieux de fantaisie et de lyrisme. . . . Swinburne parla de Victor Hugo avec un enthousiasme infini.

Maupassant afterwards allowed his imagination to run away with him regarding the household of Swinburne and his surroundings at Étretat. His legends amused Paris in later days, and when the echo of them reached Putney, Swinburne was justly incensed. But Maupassant's earliest unvarnished impression of the poet's conversation and manner is admirable. The French are masters of the art of observation, and their records have an unprejudiced value. I may therefore be allowed to print here the report of M. René Maizeroy, written down immediately after meeting Swinburne in Paris :

Rien qu'à voir la silhouette étrange de l'homme, comme échappée d'un conte fantastique de Poë, ce corps maigre, raidi, secoué de frissons nerveux, les yeux fixes, dilatées comme par la contemplation de subtiles visions de rêve, l'impressionnante mobilité des traits, les lèvres pâles, le front démesuré autour duquel flottent des cheveux ni blonds, ni roux, on se sent en présence de quelque artiste bizarre et passionné. . . . Swinburne est . . . hanté de chimères radieuses, toujours poursuivi par d'impossibles et d'éperdus désirs et troublé par la pensée macabre de la Mort.

It is to be noted that each of these independent observers uses the word " macabre," to describe one part of Swinburne's conversation, in which a sort of aesthetic value in the circumstance of pain and horror was insisted on, with a rather childish dwelling upon dead bodies and skeletons,

that struck some observers as being more serious than it really was. This love of the horrible was reflected, to some degree, in his early poetry, but was vigorously, and properly, stamped out by Watts-Dunton, who could not endure it. There was a side of Swinburne, in his early maturity, which delighted in being "horrid," in the sense of Miss Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*. Legends have been spread, and more will doubtless turn up, in support of this charge of being "macabre." They must not all be credited, nor must they all be summarily denied, because they are based on a certain rebellious impishness, a desire "to make your flesh creep," which was eminently characteristic of the early Swinburne. He liked to be what Parisian journalists used to call "schoking"; and this must not be ignored as a part of his instinctive passion for revolt against authority.

As every development of character in Swinburne was justified and fostered by literature, we may look with confidence to his early reading of such vehement writers as Milton, Landor, and Carlyle for the sources of his rebellious attitude to society. It was largely intellectual, for he did not rebel with any consecutive violence against the laws of the land. But the idea of "passive obedience" filled him with wrath, and he could not write about so elegant and frosty a poet as Collins without a diatribe on "the divine right and the godlike duty of tyrannicide." To a nature such as Swinburne's a single book will sometimes come in early youth with an appeal so penetrating and at the same time so over-

whelming that the whole nature is, for the rest of life, subdued and tinctured by it. So to Swinburne came *Les Châtiments* of Victor Hugo, published in 1853, when the English boy was entering his seventeenth year, and in a condition of the keenest precocious susceptibility. It seemed to him then, as it continued to seem until the end of his life, that "if ever a more superb structure of lyric verse was devised by the brain of man" it must have been in some language unknown to him. It was not the style, but the temper of it, which passed into his blood.

The dominant note of *Les Châtiments* is one of arrogant indignation, splendid scorn, withering and melodious invective. If Swinburne had first met with this mass of inflammatory verse at a later date, when his own taste was more mature, it is probable, nay, almost certain, that he would have perceived in it faults of vociferous and mechanical over-emphasis. He might have hesitated before flinging himself before the remarkable exile of Jersey, and calling him "the omnipotent sovereign of song," on the single score of his rodomontade against "dead dogs and rotting Caesars." And it is noticeable that *Les Contemplations*, much as he applauded them, never approached *Les Châtiments* in their effect upon Swinburne's temperament, mainly, no doubt, because they were published three years later, and did not reach him till his taste had reached a point where it was no longer subject to much modification. From the satirical poems of Hugo—the Hugo travestied as Juvenal in such pieces

as "Lazare" and "L'Empereur s'amuse,"—Swinburne adopted a certain attitude of being astride the barricade of existence, shouting at the top of his voice, with a flambeau in his fist. It was inconsistent with the dignity, gentleness, and docility which were also natural to him.

These latter were much accentuated in his declining years. An observer of more than usual penetration visited him in the spring of 1899, and Mr. Max Beerbohm obliges me with some notes of great value:

> A strange small figure in grey, having an air at once noble and roguish, proud and skittish. My name was roared to him. In shaking his hand, I bowed low, of course,—a bow *du cœur*; and he, in the old aristocratic manner, bowed equally low, but with such swiftness that we narrowly escaped concussion. . . . The first impression he made on me, or would make on any one, was of a very great gentleman indeed. Not of an *old* gentleman either. [He was, in fact, not 62.] Sparse and straggling though the grey hair was that fringed the immense pale dome of his head, and venerably haloed though he was for me by his greatness, there was yet about him something—boyish? girlish? childish, rather; something of a beautifully well-bred child. But he had the eyes of a god and the smile of an elf. In figure, at first sight, he seemed almost fat, but this was merely because of the way he carried himself, with his long neck strained so tightly back that he all receded from the waist upwards. . . . When he bowed, he did not unbend his back, but only his neck—the length of the neck accounting for the depth of the bow. His hands were tiny, even for his size, and they fluttered helplessly, touchingly, unceasingly.

In absolute contrast, too, to his rebellious and tempestuous effusion, was the intense delight

which he unaffectedly felt in the company of little children. This did not, I believe, develop very early; I have not found any traces of it before 1870, and it did not until very much later take those proportions which made Swinburne at Putney the idol of mothers and the laughing-stock of nursery-maids. Here, again, it is impossible not to see in what became a perfectly natural and sincere movement an impulse originally coming less from life than from literature.

It has been crudely said that Swinburne pretended to be fond of infants because Victor Hugo had written poems about them. This is false; no one less than Swinburne "pretended" to be this or that, no one must be defended as possessing a more perfect personal sincerity. But it is very doubtful whether he would have noticed the beauty of little children if Hugo had not called his attention to it, and it is within the recollection of some of us that the publication of *L'Art d'être grand-père* in 1878 was coeval with a tremendous revival of Swinburne's admiration of the babies of his friends, and that it stimulated the composition of such songs as the delicious

> Golden bells of welcome rolled
> Never forth such notes, nor told
> Hours so blithe in tones so bold,
> As the radiant mouth of gold
> Here that rings forth heaven;
> If the golden-crested wren
> Were a nightingale—why, then,
> Something seen and heard of men
> Might be half as sweet as when
> Laughs a child of seven.

The sentiment expressed here, and so often elsewhere, was perfectly genuine. Swinburne was never more radiantly happy than when passively enduring hardships from babes, and some of the most delightful recollections of him that my wife and I possess are connected with the infancy of our own little ones. I shall never lose from my memory the picture of the poet seated stiffly on the sofa (his favourite station) in our house, with one of my small girls perched on each of his little knees, while my son, just advanced to knickerbockers, having climbed up behind him, with open palm was softly stroking his bald cranium, as though it had been the warm and delicious egg of some enormous bird. At that moment the rapturous face of the poet wore no trace of the tyrannicide.

There is something very attractive in the accessibility of those who are difficult of approach. Swinburne was not at the beck and call of stray applicants, but he could, on due occasion, be extremely gracious. I owe to the kindness of H.H. the Ranee of Sarawak an affecting example of this. It was late, it appears, in 1892 that her younger son, after a long illness, was ordered to Wimbledon, where a very severe operation was performed on him. As he was recovering, the boy was taken out daily in a Bath chair on Wimbledon Common, and so crossed the poet's regular walk. "One day, when Bertram seemed more cast down than ever, and depressed by his illness," says the Ranee, "I asked him what I could do or get for him, as I would do anything that was possible to cheer him up. 'Well,' he

answered, 'I want but one thing, and that is—to know Mr. Swinburne. I see him almost every day, and I do so wish that he would once speak to me!'" The Ranee was greatly perplexed, for she knew no one who was intimate with the poet. By a fortunate chance, however, Lady Ritchie called on her that very afternoon, and she, when she heard the story, said, "Come along! I will take you to Mr. Swinburne *now*!" The Ranee continues the narrative:

A fourwheeler was procured in which we rumbled from Wimbledon to Putney. Conceive my excitement! We rang the bell at The Pines, and—*both of us*—were let in. We were led up two flights of stairs into the poet's room, where he stood with his back to the chimney. Lady Ritchie told our story, when Swinburne said, "I'll come at once. Only wait till I get my boots on." So we sat down at each end of a table, whilst Swinburne pulled off a pair of scarlet flannel slippers, and then proceeded to hunt for his boots. These not turning up, he wandered into several rooms, reappearing again, after a long while, triumphant, boots in hand. He put them on before us, and then and there we carried him back in the fourwheeler to our house in Wimbledon. You may imagine the delight of my boy. The beloved Poet's visit, and his subsequent ones (for they were many, and covered weeks and months), were a principal factor in Bertram's subsequent recovery. I could tell you much of those many visits, and of Swinburne's kindness, his dear funny ways, his sense of humour, his readings of Dickens, the extraordinary *humble* way (and he so great!) in which he consulted Bertram about certain lines in his "Grace Darling," which he was then writing.

Swinburne was a great declaimer and reciter, both of his own poems and those of others. His voice was a strange but extremely agreeable one,

when he did not allow it to get beyond his control. It was "the pure Ashburnham voice," as Lord Redesdale tells me, which his mother had "passed down to him and to no other of her children." Mr. James Fitzmaurice-Kelly reminds me of Swinburne's "exquisite clearness of utterance, particularly noticeable in his pronunciation of such words as 'Ariosto,' in which he reproduced the full rich quality of the Italian vowels with perfect correctness." As Mr. Max Beerbohm says, "the frail, sweet voice rose and fell, lingered, quickened, in all manner of trills and roulades. That he himself could not hear it seemed the greatest loss his deafness inflicted on him." To the last he spoke in a gentle tone; unlike most deaf people, he did not raise his voice when he talked, except under excitement. "Save that now and again a note would come out metallic and overpitched, the tones were under good control."

Elsewhere I have described the funny little ritual which Swinburne always went through after arriving at a friend's house with a breast-pocket bulging with manuscript. I do not remember any variation in this ceremony, which sometimes preluded many hours of reading and recitation. He delighted in repeating other poetry, and was particularly ready to spout the dramas of Aeschylus, when he would gradually become intoxicated by the sonority of the Greek, and would dance about the room in the choral passages, making a very surprising noise. These performances were entrancing to some persons, of whom I was one, but annoying and even

alarming to others. Watts-Dunton did not permit them after the exodus to The Pines, when Swinburne, although he read aloud and recited more than ever, was not allowed to be corybantic. Maarten Maartens, to whom the poet read *The Tale of Balen* in June 1895, did not unreservedly admire his delivery :

> It was too subjective an out-pour, and wearisomely impassioned, like a child's jump against a wall, but it was his appropriate utterance of his own creation. You felt the immediate concord between the travail and the bringing forth. At the first moment, however, when he ceased, I felt a poignant grief that it was over, a past experience in my life, an emotion of poetic sympathy I should never feel again. It had been very beautiful. Gloriously, and to me quite newly, direct ; all the difference between seeing a beautiful woman and feeling her embrace.

A great deal of the prejudice which was felt against Swinburne in his early and middle life arose from the fact that he allowed himself to speak in somewhat reckless terms about the established forms of religion. His conversation, like his poems, was frequently ornamented with violent denunciation of priests, nor has a certain section of our reading public ever forgiven him for the " Hymn of Man," which he wrote during the session in Rome of the Oecumenical Council. It will not be contended by Swinburne's best friends that his wonderful gift of metaphor did not tempt him to outbursts which in his more temperate moods he could hardly seek to justify. He had, to use his own hitherto unpublished words, " a touch of Byronic ambition to be

thought an eminent and terrible enemy to the decorous life and respectable fashion of the world; and, as in Byron's case, there was mingled with a sincere scorn and horror of hypocrisy a boyish and voluble affectation of audacity and excess." He admitted that it was a pleasure to him to flutter the Philistines in Gath. On this subject his own words outweigh all other testimony; and these we possess in a letter (Feb. 21, 1875) addressed to E. C. Stedman:

> A Theist I never was; I always felt by instinct and perceived by reason that no man could conceive of a *personal* God except by crude superstition or else by true supernatural revelation; that a natural God was the absurdest of all human figments; because no man could by other than apocalyptic means—that is, by other means than a violation of the laws and order of nature—*conceive* of any other sort of Divine purpose than man with a difference—man with some qualities intensified and some qualities suppressed — man with the good in him exaggerated and the evil excised. . . . But we who worship no material incarnation of any qualities, no person, may worship the Divine humanity, the ideal of human perfection and aspiration, without worshipping any god, any person, any fetish at all. Therefore I might call myself, if I wished, a kind of Christian (of the Church of Blake and Shelley), but assuredly in no sense a Theist.

When he wrote this, he had just been reading with great emotion Matthew Arnold's "*very* good and fine" *Literature and Dogma*, ostensibly to see whether Arnold gave him any reasons for abandoning the Pantheistic attitude which he had himself defined in "Hertha" and elsewhere. But this book only confirmed him in what he called a "clarified Nihilism" with regard to

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all faith which is founded upon an anthropomorphic illusion. The only degree in which Swinburne, to the very end of his life, approached orthodox Christianity was in his reiterated expressions of reverence for Christ as the type of human aspiration and perfection: "Jesus may have been the highest and purest sample of man on record," he would grant, and this was the limit of his acquiescence. The best summing-up of his pantheism is to be found in the lofty stanzas of "Hertha."

An almost religious character accompanied his ideas of friendship, which he understood as involving a certain amount of devotion and, at least theoretically, of sacrifice. Those who have followed this record of his life will be aware of the absorbing part which Swinburne's friends occupied in his thoughts and actions. He was not very effusive in his protestations of affection, and in his social relations he usually kept himself, with a certain dignity, a little aloof from even those whom he most admired and loved. He was seldom demonstrative, and he greatly disliked a "gushing" or over-confidential manner; perhaps one of his most charming traits was the refinement of his reserve. But he cultivated the essentials of friendship with great care, and he was loyal to those to whom he had once surrendered his heart. Forty years after their Oxford days together, and when they had been drawn far from one another by circumstances, news of the sinking health of William Morris drew from Swinburne to Burne-Jones a most delicate and tender communication, in which

he told his old friends that he often composed letters to them both in his mind,—" Such letters, my dear Ned, as St. Jerome might have indited to St. Augustine if they had been contemporaries, as no doubt they were capable of being." They were priests together in the service of art, which to Swinburne was religion, and there existed, besides, the ties of old companionship and unbroken personal confidence.

For some objects of his intellectual admiration, Swinburne frankly cultivated a worship which seemed uncouth to the profane. His attitude to old men of genius, or even of beautiful talent, was unique; he was adorable in humility and sweetness to Landor, to Barry Cornwall, to that wild pirate Trelawney, to the still wilder Wells of *Joseph and his Brethren*. He delighted in the abandonment of praising these aged heroes, and he thrilled to meet their gratified response. " It is comfortable," he said on one occasion, " when one does, once in a way, go in for a complete quiet bit of hero-worship, and it is an honest interlude of relief to find it taken up instead of thrown away." After describing the idolatry with which he flung himself at the feet of Landor in 1864, he wrote: " I am not sure that any other emotion is so endurable and persistently delicious as that of worship, when your god is indubitable and incarnate before your eyes." In his ecstasy he clothed these divinities with the glory of his own imagination, and poor old threadbare Bryan Waller Procter marched in a splendour of laudation " to the beautiful veiled bright world where the glad ghosts meet." A friend who watched

him closely says: "It was one of Swinburne's charms, that he took for granted every one's delight in what he himself so fervidly delighted in. He could as soon have imagined a man not loving the very sea as not doting on the aspect of babies or not reading at least one play by an Elizabethan or Jacobean dramatist every day."

This generous extravagance was not without its inconvenient side. Where the interests of two sentiments clashed, it was impossible to induce Swinburne to compromise, and his refusal to yield one iota of his selected loyalty not unfrequently exposed him to the censure of his acquaintances. A single instance, with the ramifications of which I was personally well acquainted, will serve to exemplify this trait. In the summer of 1876, Robert Buchanan brought a suit for libel against the *Examiner* newspaper, grounded on a pseudonymous article which was written by Swinburne. This marked the last stage of the celebrated "Fleshly School" controversy. The *Examiner* was defended by Hawkins (afterwards Lord Brampton), then pre-eminent in public opinion through his recent conduct of the Tichborne case. It was held that Buchanan had no chance of success, but it appeared necessary that Hawkins should have a private consultation with Swinburne before the trial. This Swinburne flatly refused to give, to the consternation of William Minto, the editor of the *Examiner*, who had always treated Swinburne with the highest consideration and friendliness. In vain was this presented to the poet, and in vain was it pressed home to him that it was his own vivacity which

had got the *Examiner* into trouble. He obstinately declined to see Minto or to communicate with Hawkins. Why? Simply because the *Examiner* had just then published an article disagreeable to the feelings of—Mrs. Lynn Linton, who had been a sort of adopted daughter of Landor, and who therefore had a claim on Swinburne's loyalty which destroyed all sense of what he owed to the *Examiner* and indeed to his own honour. He persisted; Hawkins was cross, Buchanan won his case, and the *Examiner* had to pay £150 damages. Nor could Swinburne ever be made to see that he had incurred any blame in the matter.

A sketch of Swinburne's character would be imperfect without a tribute to his personal courage. He was afraid of nothing, and, nervous as he was, his nervousness never took the form of timidity. When he was an elderly man, a hulking poetaster, half-mad with vanity, who had endeavoured without success to engage Swinburne in a correspondence, waited for him with a big stick on one of his lonely walks, and proposed to give him a thrashing. The antagonist was a powerful man, his victim a sort of fairy; but Swinburne cowed him by sheer personal dignity, and serenely continued to walk on, with the blusterer growling behind him. Watts-Dunton was so much concerned at this occurrence, that he took out a warrant against the bully, but Swinburne laughed at his friend's fears. His own fearlessness, indeed, often exposed him to danger in crossing streets, in riding, in swimming; but his life was charmed.

Algernon Swinburne's character was essentially

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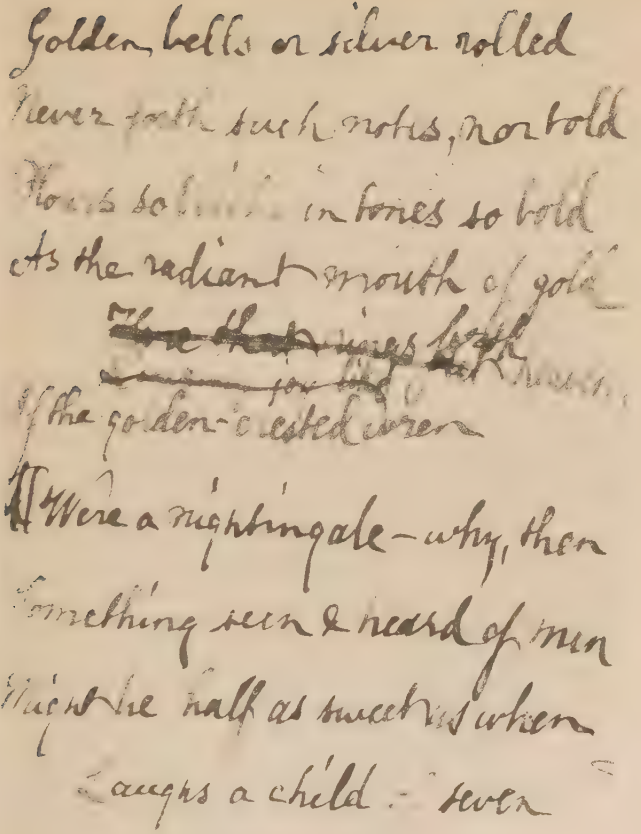
trustful and confiding. He thought no evil of those to whom he had granted his affection, but he was subject to violent and excessive revulsion of feeling if he discovered, or thought that he discovered, that his kindness had been repulsed. His sentiment for Matthew Arnold, expressed over and over again, in almost hyperbolic terms, received a rude shock in 1895 when Arnold's *Letters* were collected by a well-known person. This editor, either through carelessness or malice, allowed a passage to be printed which gave Swinburne exquisite annoyance. He had been present, in company with Froude, Browning, Ruskin, Herbert Spencer, George Lewes and Matthew Arnold, at a dinner-party given by Monckton Milnes in June 1863. Matthew Arnold, describing this dinner in a letter to his mother, very innocently mentioned as curiosities "a Cingalese in full costume, and a sort of pseudo-Shelley called Swinburne." That such a phrase should be printed in the lifetime of a famous man-of-letters was inexcusable. Swinburne came upon it by accident, and it turned all his long admiration for Arnold to gall and hatred.

With regard to Swinburne's manner of work, it was modified by his extreme dislike to the physical act of writing. What he called "the curse of penmanship" weighed heavily upon him. This was due to a weakness of the wrist which began to show itself quite early in life, and was at one time a little alarming. It developed, however, very slowly, and was at no time absolutely serious, but it made the act of holding a pen very irksome. The progress



Golden bells or silver rolled
Never forth such notes, nor told
Hours so [illegible] in tones so bold
As the radiant mouth of gold
[illegible]
Of the golden-crested oxen

If I were a nightingale – why, then
Something seen & heard of men
Might be half as sweet as when
Laughs a child – even

Original draft of Swinburne's MS. of "A Child's Laughter"

of this weakness may be traced in Swinburne's handwriting, which about 1862 became so feeble and illegible that he altered his style of holding the pen, his manuscript thereby becoming easier to read, but still more wearisome to write. The actual battling with ink and paper being a positive and often a painful effort, Swinburne evaded it as much as possible. He wrote to John Morley (May 17, 1880): "Copying is impossible to me; I could never learn the art of transcription; and I always blunder. I used always to think it, and I do now, the heaviest, brutallest and stupidest of school punishments."

He gave up copying his poems, even for the press, and adopted the habit of sending to the printers his first rough draft, with all his corrections and changes. The result is that from the time of *Chastelard* downward few works of Swinburne's exist or have ever existed in a MS. duplicate.[1] Swinburne nourished the belief that his hatred of the act of writing was shared by Shakespeare, whose "villainous pothooks" he used to compare with his own. He spoke, not without a certain complacency, of his "exceptionally awful scrawl, almost as bad as Landor's own —the only point on which I can hope to rival him in writing, if even there he can ever be rivalled, except by Shakespeare." It has been suggested to me by Mr. Wise, who was unusually familiar with Swinburne's methods, that his physical

[1] Mr. T. J. Wise, who has made a close study of Swinburne's MSS., tells me that there are two copies of the *Song of Italy* and of a certain number of sonnets. He has seen fragments of a duplicate MS. of *Tristram*. But, with these modifications, he confirms my general statement in the text.

difficulty in writing, and his habit of composing, revising, and working up his complete sentence before struggling with the unwelcome pen, had something to do with the artificial and ponderous character of his later prose.

APPENDIX I

SWINBURNE AT ETON

A LETTER FROM LORD REDESDALE

1 Kensington Courts,
May 10, 1912.

My dear Gosse — Here are the criticisms which suggest themselves to me on Mr. ——'s letter to the *Times* about Swinburne's Eton days. You will see that my personal recollections do not tally with his. Appendix I.

Amina, the ghoul of the Arabian Nights, and the archetype of the genus, was a lady. But there are also male ghouls and even sexless ghouls, and it is to a subdivision of the latter that a certain species of literary ghouls must be referred. These batten upon the fame of the illustrious dead. An inspired poet or prophet, a prince of letters, passes away. That is your ghoul's opportunity. Immediately he indites a letter to the *Times* or to any other newspaper that will give him print, in a fever of impatience to give to the world what he is pleased to call his "reminiscences." He may never have known the great man, he may have just received a nod from him, or even have been cut dead—that is immaterial—upon the perilous foundation of that nod, or no-nod, he will build his crazy fabric.

Algernon Charles Swinburne died in the spring of 1909. Revelling in the pleasures of the imagination Mr. —— at once fired off a letter to the *Times* upon the subject of Swinburne's Eton days, and in that letter there is hardly a word which does not show that the

writer knew nothing about Swinburne, and that his vaunted friendship with the poet was a myth. In the first place Swinburne did not board at Coleridge's but at Joynes's. I doubt whether he ever set foot in the former House, for he was a very stay-at-home boy, shy and reserved—not at all given to gadding about in other houses and other boys' rooms. Had Mr. —— known him "fairly well," he must at least have remembered to what House he belonged. As a matter of fact I never saw them speak to one another. I was Swinburne's first cousin, and bound by ties of deep affection and gratitude to his mother—my aunt. During the first part of his stay at Eton, we were much together, and, as I shall show presently, very intimate. To my sorrow the friendship was interrupted by circumstances which unavoidably separated us. There was no quarrel, no shadow of a misunderstanding. But I was sent into College, Swinburne remained an Oppidan. Between the Collegers and the Oppidans there was little or no traffic. —— also was a Colleger, and the same reason that parted Swinburne and me, closely related as we were, and intimate as we had been, would almost preclude —— from even making his acquaintance outside of the schoolroom. Had there been any friendship between them it could hardly have escaped my knowledge. In 1853 I left College and became once more an Oppidan: but it was too late: Swinburne had left or was just leaving. In after days our lives lay widely apart. Only once did I meet him in intimacy. We had a long delightful talk, but it was a flash in the pan. The fates drove us asunder again.

Swinburne entered Eton at the beginning of the summer half of 1849. His father, the Admiral, and my aunt, Lady Jane, brought him, and at once sent for me to put him under my care. I was to "look after him." It is true that I was only a few weeks older than himself, and so, physically, not much of a protector; but I had already been three years at school, to which

I was sent when I was nine years old, so I knew my Eton thoroughly, and was well versed in all its dear, delightful ways—mysteries bewildering to the uninitiated. I was already a little man of the world, at any rate of that microcosm which is a public school, and so I was able to steer my small cousin through some shoals. What a fragile little creature he seemed as he stood there between his father and mother, with his wondering eyes fixed upon me! Under his arm he hugged his Bowdler's Shakespeare, a very precious treasure, bound in brown leather with, for a marker, a narrow slip of ribbon, blue I think, with a button of that most heathenish marqueterie called Tunbridge ware dangling from the end of it. He was strangely tiny. His limbs were small and delicate; and his sloping shoulders looked far too weak to carry his great head, the size of which was exaggerated by the touzled mass of red hair standing almost at right angles to it. Hero-worshippers talk of his hair as having been a "golden aureole." At that time there was nothing golden about it. Red, violent, aggressive red it was, unmistakable, unpoetical carrots.

His features were small and beautiful, chiselled as daintily as those of some Greek sculptor's masterpieces. His skin was very white—not unhealthy, but a transparent tinted white, such as one sees in the petals of some roses. His face was the very replica of that of his dear mother, and she was one of the most refined and lovely of women. His red hair must have come from the Admiral's side, for I never heard of a red-haired Ashburnham. The Admiral himself, whom I rarely saw, was, so well as my memory serves me, already grizzled, but his hair must have been originally very fair or even red. Another characteristic which Algernon inherited from his mother was the voice. All who knew him must remember that exquisitely soft voice with a rather sing-song intonation, like that of Russians when they put the music of their own Slav voices into the French language. All his mother's

brothers and sisters had it. He alone, so far as I know, among my cousins reproduced it. Listening to him sometimes I could almost fancy that I could hear my aunt herself speaking, so startling was the likeness. His language, even at that age, was beautiful, fanciful, and richly varied. Altogether my recollection of him in those schooldays is that of a fascinating, most lovable little fellow. It is but a child's impression of another child. But I believe it to be just.

We rapidly became friends. Of course, being in separate Houses, we could not be so constantly together as if we had both been in the same House. I was at Evans' and Durnford was my tutor. He was at Joynes's and of course Joynes was his tutor. Still we often met, and pretty frequently breakfasted together, he with me, or I with him. Chocolate in his room, tea in mine. The guest brought his own " order " of rolls and butter, and the feast was made rich by the addition of sixpenny-worth of scraped beef or ham from Joe Groves's, a small sock-shop which was almost immediately under Joynes's House. Little gifts such as our humble purses could afford cemented our friendship: I still possess and treasure an abbreviated edition of Froissart's Chronicles which Algernon gave me now, alas! sixty-three years ago. We ourselves were abbreviated editions in those days!

It was at Eton that he began to feel his wings. His bringing up at home had been scrupulously strict. His literary diet the veriest pap. His precocious brain had been nourished upon food for babes. Not a novel had he been allowed to open, not even Walter Scott's. Shakespeare he only knew through the medium of his precious brown Bowdler. ——'s picture of Swinburne sitting by the fire reading poetry is rank nonsense: he had not the books: his school work was prepared, as in the case of other boys, in his room: his reading for pleasure was done in the boys' library in Weston's yard. I can see him now sitting perched up Turk- or tailor-

wise in one of the windows looking out on the yard, with some huge old-world tome, almost as big as himself, upon his lap, the afternoon sun setting on fire the great mop of red hair. There it was that he emancipated himself, making acquaintance with Shakespeare (minus Bowdler), Marlowe, Spenser, Ben Jonson, Ford, Massinger, Beaumont and Fletcher, and the other poets and playwrights of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. His tendency was greatly towards the Drama, especially the Tragic Drama. He had a great sense of humour in others. He would quote Dickens, especially Mrs. Gamp, unwearyingly; but his own genius leaned to tragedy. No less absurd is it to say that as a boy "he had an extraordinarily wide knowledge of the Greek poets, which he read with ease in the original." His study of the Greek tragedians, upon whose work he so largely modelled his own, came much later in life. At Eton these were lessons, and lessons are odious; besides, you cannot take in Aeschylus in homoeopathic doses of thirty lines, and he knew no more Greek than any intelligent boy of his age would do, nor did he take any prominent place in the regular school work, though he was a Prince Consort's prizeman for modern languages.

His first love in literature was given to the English poets, and after or together with these he devoured the great classics of France and Italy. His memory was wonderful, his power of quotation almost unlimited. We used to take long walks together in Windsor Forest and in the Home Park, where the famous oak of Herne the Hunter was still standing, a white, lightning-blasted skeleton of a tree, a fitting haunt for "fairies, black, grey, green and white," and a very favourite goal of our expeditions. As he walked along with that peculiar dancing step of his, his eyes gleaming with enthusiasm, and his hair, like the zazzera of the old Florentines, tossed about by the wind, he would pour out in his unforgettable voice the treasures

which he had gathered at his last sitting. Other boys would watch him with amazement, looking upon him as a sort of inspired elfin—something belonging to another sphere. None dreamt of interfering with him —as for bullying there was none of it. He carried with him one magic charm—he was absolutely courageous. He did not know what fear meant. It is generally the coward, the weakling in character, far more than the weakling in thews and sinews, that is bullied. Swinburne's pluck as a boy always reminds me of Kinglake's description in *Eothen* of Dr. Keate, the famous head master of Eton: "He was little more (if more at all) than five feet in height, and was not very great in girth, but within this space was concentrated the pluck of ten battalions." That was Swinburne all over, and puny as he was, I verily believe, that had any boy, however big, attempted to bully him, that boy would have caught a Tartar. Of games he took no heed; I do not think that he ever possessed a cricket bat, but of walking and swimming he never tired. And so he led a sort of charmed life—a fairy child in the midst of a commonplace, workaday world. As Horace said of himself, "Non sine Dis animosus infans."

As for the fabulous race to Pote Williams' shop for the first copy of *Maud* in 1855, which Mr. —— "believes" he won, it is enough to say that as Swinburne left Eton in 1853, it must have taken place in dreamland. Upon that subject the letter of Mr. Cornish, which appeared in the same day's *Times* as that of Mr. ——, is authoritative and incontrovertible. Poor Mr. ——! How little he thought that the same column of the *Times* would contain his invention and its contradiction: the poison and the antidote.

One more trait which you may like to find room for. I have told you about his courage. He was no horseman and had no opportunity at home for riding. But in the matter of horses he was absolutely without terror. He, unskilled though he was, would ride anything as

fearless as a Centaur. Rides with his cousin, Lady Katherine Ashburnham (afterwards Bannermann), were among his great delights in that glorious forest-like country above Ashburnham Place.

There is no truth in the story, how coined I know not, that Swinburne disliked Eton. There Mr. —— is, as an exception, correct. The poet was not made of the stuff which moulds the enthusiastic schoolboy, and I much doubt whether any school would, as such, have appealed to him. But Eton stands by itself. Its old traditions and its chivalrous memories, its glorious surroundings, meant for him something more than mere school: he looked back upon the grey towers, Windsor, the Forest, the Brocas, the Thames, Cuckoo Weir—with an affection which inspired his commemoration ode, and which, I believe, never left him. The place touched his poet's soul as no other school could have done, and so it fitted him.

Believe me to be, my dear Gosse, yours sincerely,

Redesdale.

APPENDIX II

PAULINE, LADY TREVELYAN

LETTER FROM SIR GEORGE OTTO TREVELYAN, BART.

WALLINGTON, *June* 8, 1916.

DEAR EDMUND GOSSE — Pauline, Lady Trevelyan, was a woman of singular and unique charm; quiet and quaint in manner, nobly emotional, ingrainedly artistic, very wise and sensible, with an ever-flowing spring of the most delicious humour. No friend of hers, man or woman, could ever have enough of her company; and those friends were many, and included the first people of the day in every province of distinction.

She was Algernon Swinburne's good angel; and (to quote one of his letters) he regarded her with "filial feelings." It was a very real and permanent misfortune for him that Pauline Trevelyan died in middle life in the summer of 1866; and sad it was for me, too, since she was a second mother to me, who was so rich in that blessing already. Widely and almost absurdly different as we two young men were, Pauline Trevelyan was catholic enough to be in sympathy with both of us.

Algernon Swinburne and I had not a taste, or a pursuit, in common. The books, and the men, that he loved and admired when he was a youth of twenty years old, are known to the world through the medium of his exquisite literature. I, on the other hand, never tired of reading, and talking about, Thackeray, and *Tristram Shandy*, and Albert Smith's and Theodore

Hook's novels, and (I must in fairness say) about Aristophanes and Juvenal. No author then existed for me who was not a favourite with Macaulay; and, though that gave me a large field of choice, it must be allowed that Macaulay's reading did not lie along the same lines as that of Gabriel Rossetti's circle. Moreover, I was always eager to be after the blackcock and partridges, although I shot much less well than Algernon Swinburne wrote poetry.

There was no liking, or disliking, between us; but the plain fact is that we were not to each other's purpose. Each went his own way; and joyous ways they were. Not only can I remember nothing that he ever said to me, but I cannot even recall our having walked, or conversed, together. I regarded him with awe, and some apprehension, as one who could write French *ballades*, and who seemed to know all about King Arthur's Court; and I have no doubt whatever that he regarded me as coming straight from Gath.

My sole recollection is of hearing him, more than once, reciting poetry to the ladies in the Italian saloon at Wallington. He sat in the middle of the room, with one foot curled up on the seat of the chair beneath him, declaiming verse with a very different intonation and emphasis from that with which our set of young Cantabs read Byron and Keats to each other in our college rooms at Trinity. That is the beginning and the end of what I have to tell. Towards the close of a very long life my keenest and most genuine regrets are connected with my wasted opportunities for gaining a real and vivid knowledge of famous people who have passed away.—Ever yours sincerely,

George Otto Trevelyan.

It is impossible to exaggerate Pauline's influence over people. Ruskin and the second Lady Ashburton, in their way the most masterful people I ever knew,

treated me on her account with an extraordinary kindness. When Lady Ashburton was the most splendid and noble unmarried woman, in great request, she would stay six weeks at a time at Wallington.

Shortly before Pauline died, Sir Walter built her a villa on the coast near Seaton, in Dorsetshire, as a dower-house in case of his death. Lady Ashburton immediately bought the next plot of land, and hurriedly built a fine villa next door. Then Pauline died; and I doubt much whether Lady Ashburton lived there afterwards. But of that I am not sure.

APPENDIX III

SWINBURNE AND MALLARMÉ

LETTER FROM MR. GEORGE MOORE

121 Ebury Street, S.W.
2nd December, 1912.

My dear Gosse — You say you have been waiting a whole week for the Mallarmé-Swinburne note, and that you want it instantly. Well, my dear friend, you can have it instantly, but I am afraid you will be disappointed. Anecdotes of the kind are well enough in conversation, but when we take up the pen to transcribe them, they seem slightly too slight for transcription. But since you must have it, here goes!

One night at Mallarmé's—he received on Tuesday night, but in the 'seventies he was not a celebrity and very few came to his receptions; I think we generally spent Tuesday night together, *tête-à-tête*. One night the conversation turned on Swinburne, and he showed me a long correspondence, written on sheets of blue foolscap paper, in a shaky handwriting, about the poem which Swinburne was asked to contribute, and which he did contribute to *La République des Lettres*, "Une Nocturne," a sestina written in French. Swinburne had asked Mallarmé to alter anything that seemed to him to need alteration, and Mallarmé consequently altered the second line of the poem, and the alteration drew from Swinburne at least three voluminous epistles. Other alterations were made by Swinburne at Mallarmé's suggestion; these I do not remember,

but Mallarmé's I remember quite well. Swinburne wrote :

La nuit écoute et se penche sur l'onde
Pour recueillir rien qu'un souffle d'amour.

"*Four recueillir rien*" did not sound agreeable to Mallarmé's French ear, and his alteration of the line shows exquisite taste. He altered the line to "*pour y cueillir rien*," etc. Swinburne discussed the alteration with Mallarmé, maintaining that his reason for using *recueillir* was that it seemed to him that *cueillir* would be more properly applied to apples and pears than to a breath of love. Whether the verse appeared in *La République des Lettres* as corrected by Mallarmé or in its original form I do not know, but in the volume you will find Mallarmé's correction.

There was another line later on, in the last stanza but one I think, of which we could make nothing. The first word seemed to us like *l'orme*, and Mallarmé asked me if there was any word in English like *l'orme*. He could think of nothing in French except the elm, and the elm of course did not come into the sentence. In a subsequent letter Swinburne sent half a dozen versions for Mallarmé to select from. I think the line now reads :

"Le sang du beau pied blessé de l'amour."

One phrase in the letters I remember. He had heard that some French writer had said, speaking of his (Swinburne's) French verses, that they were *les efforts géants d'un barbare*. This phrase inspired many grand rolling sentences. He was unwilling as unable to accept the praise implied by the word *géant*, for his verses in French were those of a barbarian, etc. Though he knew of course that the word was used in the Greek sense still it was not a foreigner's verses that he wished to send, etc. I wish I could remember the torrent of words that he poured forth on this subject. You must get the letters. Of course *ses vers sont des vers d'un*

barbare. What else could they be? And if I may be allowed to carry the Frenchman's criticism a little further I will say that they seem to me to be French verses written by a man who could not speak French. I cannot help thinking that his French verses wear the same sort of deadly pallor that the Latin of a mediaeval poet would wear if a great poet had written in the Middle Ages.

I never saw Swinburne but once, and I cannot remember whether it was before or after the publication of the sestina. We were all carried away on the hurricane winds of Swinburne's verses in the 'seventies, and I think it was the ambition of everybody who wrote verses to see the poet. Rossetti, William Michael it must have been, told me that all I had to do was to go and present myself and that I should find Swinburne very agreeable and pleased to see me. It was William Michael who gave me the address. As well as I can recollect he said Bedford Row. You tell me that he lived in Great James Street, which is near Bedford Row; that may be so, no doubt is so. I remember that one entered the house by an open doorway, as in the Temple, and that I went upstairs, and on the first floor began to wonder on which Swinburne lived; thinking to see a clerk engaged in copying entries into a ledger I opened a door and found myself in a large room in which there was no furniture except a truckle bed. Outside the sheets lay a naked man, a strange, impish little body it was, and about the head, too large for the body, was a great growth of red hair. The fright that this naked man caused me is as vivid in me to-day as if it had only occurred yesterday, possibly more vivid. I had gone to see Swinburne, expecting to find a man seated in an arm-chair reading a book, one who would probably ask me if I smoked cigarettes or cigars, and who would talk to me about Shelley. I had no idea what Swinburne's appearance was like, but there was no doubt in my mind that the naked

man was Swinburne. How I knew it to be Swinburne I cannot tell. I felt that there could be nobody but Swinburne who would look like that, and he looked to me like a dreadful caricature of myself. The likeness was remarkable, at first sight; if you looked twice I am sure it disappeared. We were both very thin, our hair was the same colour, flaming red; Swinburne had a very high forehead and I had a very high forehead, and we both had long noses, and though I have a little more chin than Swinburne, mine is not a prominent chin. It seemed to me that at the end of a ball, coming downstairs at four o'clock in the morning, I had often looked like the man on the bed, and the idea of sitting next to that naked man, so very like myself, and explaining to him that I had come from William Michael Rossetti frightened me nearly out of my wits. I just managed to babble out, "Does Mr. Jones live here?" The red head shook on a long thin neck like a tulip, and I heard, "Will you ask downstairs?" I fled and jumped into a hansom, and never heard of Swinburne again until he wrote to Philip Bourke Marston a letter about *A Mummer's Wife* which Philip Bourke Marston had sent him. Of that letter I remember a phrase: "It was not with a chamber pot for buckler and a spit for a spear that I charged the Philistines." He afterwards wrote to me explaining away this letter which did not annoy me in the least. The absurd epithets that he piled up in his prose could not annoy anybody; they merely amused me. He wrote the worst prose ever written by a great poet.

Now, my dear Gosse, I have sent you the note which you asked for. It seems to me to be without any interest, but that is not my affair, it is yours. It may, however, induce you to go to Paris and try to persuade Mallarmé's daughter to give you copies of Swinburne's letters to her father; or if you like I will go there as a missionary on your behalf.—Very sincerely yours,

GEORGE MOORE.

APPENDIX IV

SWINBURNE'S POSTHUMOUS WRITINGS

WHEN Swinburne died, he left no directions, verbal or testamentary, with regard to the publication of any MSS. which might be found among his papers. Some final reflections on Shakespeare, written in 1905, although not published by the Oxford University Press until 1909, had been arranged for by their author some time before his fatal illness. Watts-Dunton had nothing whatever to do with either the genesis or completion of this book, which was composed in response to a request from the publishers, and was delivered to the press many months before its posthumous appearance. The publishers held it back, until the poet's death incited them to a hasty publication. But Watts-Dunton discovered various writings, both in verse and prose, several of which were essentially more important than the little treatise on Shakespeare. All were found at The Pines, although in different places. They belong to widely different epochs in the poet's life; some, no doubt, had been rejected by him, and yet preserved, perhaps with some lingering idea of future adaptation or resuscitation.

Soon after Swinburne's death, Watts-Dunton consulted Mr. Thomas J. Wise, whose Swinburne collection is the finest in existence, as to the best manner of preserving the unpublished MSS., until the time should be ripe for their regular publication in suitable collected volumes. It was decided that it would be a pity to disperse them

Appendix IV.

in magazines, while at the same time it was highly desirable to preserve them in type, the more so as all the originals presently passed out of Watts-Dunton's possession, into that of Mr. Wise, who purchased from Watts-Dunton both the MSS. and the copyrights of them. The result of the discussion was that Mr. Wise, in collaboration with Watts-Dunton, proceeded to print, in an extremely limited issue, a series of posthumous Swinburne pamphlets, these pamphlets being provided, when it was necessary, with introductions signed by Watts-Dunton or by myself. It was recognised both by Mr. Wise and Watts-Dunton that this mode of permanent preservation of the scattered remnants of the poet's work would have appealed strongly to Swinburne himself, who avowed himself to be "a bit of a bibliomaniac," and who on many occasions was eager to embrace the opportunity of circulating particular poems in that limited pamphlet-form which appeals to the lover of rare books. With the advance of years, Watts-Dunton found the task of reading Swinburne's crabbed handwriting increasingly painful, and in fact the text of the whole of the unpublished writings was deciphered by Mr. Wise, with my help.

After the unpublished compositions had been satisfactorily disposed of, the question had to be considered of what should be done with the very numerous articles and letters to the Press, printed by Swinburne in magazines and newspapers, but not yet collected. A similar plan was adopted. Mr. Wise collected the scattered writings, I furnished the necessary critical introductions, and under Watts-Dunton's sympathetic auspices these also were privately printed in a suitable and uniform shape. It was Mr. Wise's intention, in collaboration with Watts-Dunton, who had promised his assistance, to make from these articles such judicious selections as might be given to a wider public, but death removed Watts-Dunton before the project had been carried out. As a matter of fact the selections had

already been completed by Mr. Wise, and only awaited Watts-Dunton's introductions. The only uncollected articles not included in these private booklets are the short monographs upon some of the Elizabethan Dramatists which Swinburne intended to use in a Second Series of *The Age of Shakespeare*. These have been arranged by Mr. Wise, who had purchased the MSS. from Watts-Dunton, and the volume is ready for press.

It now remains for me to describe the most important of the posthumous MSS.

PRIVATELY PRINTED VERSE

1. Ode to Mazzini, pp. 22, 1909, 4to.
2. In the Twilight, pp. 13, 1909, 8vo.
3. Lord Soulis, pp. 21, 1909, 8vo.
4. Lord Scales, pp. 16, 1909, 8vo.
5. Border Ballads, pp. 21, 1909, 8vo.
6. Burd Margaret, pp. 15, 1909, 8vo.
7. The Worm of Spindlestonheugh, pp. 21, 1909, 8vo.
8. Lady Maisie's Bairn and other Poems, pp. 41, 1915, 8vo.
9. The Triumph of Gloriana, pp. 16, 1916, 8vo.
10. The Death of Sir John Franklin, pp. 21, 1916, 8vo.

In our opinion the most valuable portion of the hitherto unpublished work of Swinburne in verse consists of the *Border Ballads*, which were found by Watts-Dunton among the poet's papers. No fewer than eight of these ballads, all lengthy and all highly finished, were discovered at different times, and were submitted to us to be deciphered. The opinion of Watts-Dunton was that others had existed, but that " many were destroyed."

PRIVATELY PRINTED PROSE

1. The Portrait, pp. 19, 1909, 8vo.
2. The Marriage of Monna Lisa, pp. 16, 1909, 8vo.
3. The Chronicle of Queen Fredegond, pp. 74, 1909, 8vo.
4. M. Prudhomme at the International Exhibition, pp. 25, 1909. 8vo.
5. Of Liberty and Loyalty, pp. 21, 1909, 8vo.
6. A Record of Friendship, pp. 9, 1910, 8vo.

7. A Criminal Case, pp. 15, 1910, 8vo.
8. Thomas Nabbes, pp. 14, 1914, 8vo.
9. Christopher Marlowe in relation to Greene, Peele, and Lodge, pp. 21, 1914, 8vo.
10. Félicien Cossu. A burlesque, pp. 32, 1915, 8vo.
11. Théophile, pp. 35, 1915, 8vo.
12. Ernest Clouet, pp. 21, 1916, 8vo.
13. A Vision of Bags, pp. 12, 1916, 8vo.

One of the projects of his youth which Swinburne most reluctantly abandoned, if he ever abandoned it at all, was the composition of a cycle of prose stories of passion, which should be tied together, in the old Italian manner, by some gracious fable of friends, met in an idle mood at farmstead or forest palace, who tell one another romantic stories of their adventures in love and war. The whole was to be called the *Triameron*, and the contents of two days were actually planned and largely composed. The following list, written probably in 1861, was found among his papers, written out on the back of a stray leaf of the draft copy of *Chastelard*:

First Day.	Second Day.
The Two Kisses.	Lescombat.
The Portrait.	Mistress Sanders.
Dead Love.	Accorambuoni.
Dream of a Murder.	Sans Merci (betrays lover to husband).
Talking in Sleep.	A Chateaubrun of Rococo period.
A Man loved by a Witch.	A Friend of Madame Dubarry's.
The Story of Queen Fredegonde.	Bogey.
The Feast of Ladies.	Romance.
A Lover of Brinvilliers.	Bianca Capello.
The Case of René Aubryat.	

Of all these stories one only has hitherto been known to the world, if indeed it can be said to be known. This is *Dead Love*, which, at the introduction of George

Meredith, was printed in *Once a Week*, in October 1862, and afterwards by Swinburne himself as a pamphlet, which has never been reprinted, in 1864. More about the *Triameron* will possibly be divulged, when the poet's early correspondence is examined. At present we know of the existence of five of the stories mentioned in the list. *The Marriage of Monna Lisa*, which Mr. Wise privately printed in 1909, is certainly one of these, under a different title.

VERSE NOW FIRST COLLECTED

The Ballade of Truthful Charles, and other Poems, pp. 32, 1910, 8vo.

Æolus, pp. 13, 1914, 8vo.

These had already appeared in Magazines but remained uncollected at the date of the poet's death.

PROSE NOW FIRST COLLECTED

The Saviour of Society. Two Sonnets and a Controversy, pp. 34, 1909, 8vo.

Letters to the Press, pp. 114, 1912, 8vo.

"Les Fleurs du Mal," and other Studies, pp. 95, 1913, 8vo.

"Les Misérables," pp. 51, 1914, 8vo.

Pericles, and other Studies, pp. 83, 1914, 8vo.

The five articles on *Les Misérables* of Victor Hugo and the long study of Baudelaire, appeared anonymously in the *Spectator* in 1862.

Finally, Watts-Dunton arranged with Mr. Wise that the latter should collect such portions of Swinburne's correspondence as were available, and should protect these by issuing them in limited editions, preparatory to the arrangement of the whole for general publication. This was done in nineteen pamphlets between 1909 and 1915. Of these letters such a selection as would appeal to the wide literary public will in due time be

published. Swinburne was not a voluminous letter-writer, but he never wrote without having something to say, and it is difficult to take up his briefest note without finding some element of interest in it. At his best, Swinburne will be admitted to high rank among purely literary letter-writers.

NOTE

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Some light is thrown on Swinburne's religious convictions as an undergraduate by reminiscences very obligingly transmitted to me by Mr. Walter Bradford Woodgate, who was educated at St. Peter's College, Radley, near Oxford, from 1850 to 1858. The Warden of Radley was William Sewell (1804–1874) of Exeter College, the brother of Miss Elizabeth Sewell. William Sewell dispensed a rather lavish hospitality at Radley, and Mr. Woodgate recalls several visits paid there by Algernon, especially one which lasted some weeks, and probably took place during the Long Vacation of 1856. He ate at "high table" with the masters, but "he mostly associated with us boys, and was elected honorary member of the prefects' common room." There can be no question that it was the wish of his family that, through the introduction of Miss Elizabeth Sewell, the high-church principles which had been so carefully instilled into Algernon at Bonchurch should be supported at Radley. But Mr. Woodgate remembers him only as devoted to literature; "he did not go in for games, but was enthusiastic about poetry." On one occasion, at the School Debating Society, one of the older boys propounded as the subject of debate a condemnation of Tennyson's *Maud*, which had recently (1855) been published, and which had been received by the public with a strange outburst of critical misapprehension. The speaker declared that this poem "detracted from Tennyson's reputation." Algernon Swinburne, who had just read *Maud* with ecstasy, was extremely indignant. Before the debate began, he

Note. heartily ridiculed the proposed censure in a conversation in prefects' room, and when the discussion was about to begin, he jumped up, and crying out, " You're a lot of Philistines," bounced out of the room. After " this insult to true poetry " he refused to attend the meetings of the society.

On the next occasion, however, when the poet's visit was expected, Sewell informed the Sixth Form that he should not in future be able to allow Algernon Swinburne to come to Radley. The Warden said that he had felt himself forced to cancel the general invitation to him to come over from Oxford on Sundays for the day. He said that the reason was that Swinburne had contracted " theories of free-thinking in religion " which were diametrically opposed to the views of his family and shocking to Sewell himself, who insisted on High Anglican ceremonial at Radley. Sewell told the Sixth Form that he feared lest Swinburne might " inoculate boys with his sinister tenets." This was, doubtless, at the end of 1856 or beginning of 1857, soon after Mr. Woodgate was made a prefect.

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